

*"I'm Your Biggest Fan, I'll Follow You..."*

*Lady Gaga, Little Monsters and the Religious Dimension of Fandom in Pop Music*

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the religious dimension of fandom in popular music, taking as an object of reflection Lady Gaga and her fans. I combine fan studies with theories of immanence as well as Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the process of becoming, and provide a theoretical reading of the relationship between Lady Gaga and her most fervent fans, the 'little monsters.' Both fandom and religion promise a stable sense of identity and authentic community to devotees. Performing deconstructive discourse analysis on three of Lady Gaga's music videos, I demonstrate how fandom, like organized religion, can simultaneously be an emancipatory practice and a practice that seeks to deny individual subjects their agency. This thesis provides a new theoretical framework for understanding fandom, and illustrates how the purported benefits of both fandom and religion can only be gained when the figureheads of each group are symbolically destroyed by the members themselves.

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“For the strength of the pack is the wolf. So the strength of the wolf is the pack.”

– Rudyard Kipling

### Introduction

Religion has historically been a force fundamental in shaping society, intimately connected to everyday life and offering individuals a sense of both community and identity. Declining rates of participation in mainstream religious organizations across North America (Statistics Canada; Kosman and Keysar) suggest that millions of people are looking elsewhere to find what religion once offered them. As far back as the nineteenth century, critics such as Matthew Arnold suggested a connection between religion and cultural products (Arnold 123), and more recently it has been argued that one way the religious impulse manifests itself is through popular culture (Hills 2000; Lynch). Bruce David Forbes, in his Introduction to Religion and Popular Culture in America, notes, “popular culture and traditional religions function in similar ways, providing meaning and helping people cope with life’s problems” (15). In response to dwindling membership in organized religions, it is imperative to explore the alternative realms into which the powerful human desires for meaning, community, and guidance are being channelled.

Recently, an explicit connection has been made in the popular press between celebrity worship and religious worship (Svetkey; Jacobs). The act of deifying celebrity clearly has religious connotations, but it is important to avoid overly simplistic analysis. Though infatuation with celebrity culture or even a specific celebrity can understandably evoke comparisons to the religious, it is not mere idolization that best points to how an investment in popular culture can come to have religious significance. A more fertile

ground for studying this phenomenon is fan culture. Jean-Luc Nancy theorizes that humanity's impulse toward the divine is manifested in our desire to belong and be social (142-3), and what are fan groups if not a space for individuals to come together based on a shared love? Matthew Hills suggests that the neo-religious dimension of what he calls "media cults" – dedicated fan communities – in the latter part of the twentieth century must be taken seriously ("Media Fandom" 73-5), and many theorists have explored the ways in which particular fan communities exhibit elements of the religious (Doss; Jindra). There are very real parallels between the experience of the fan and that of the religious devotee, and this research seeks to unearth these parallels.

Though fandom exists across all swaths of culture, popular music provides an especially interesting arena in which to study fandom's religious dimension. Countless theorists have written on the power of music to inspire and incite action on the part of an audience. "Music is an omnipresent aspect of...day to day existence" (Bennett, Popular Music 34), and as Tia DeNora notes, music, in a way that is greater than film, television or literature, is a medium of self-expression (57), a "device for the reflexive process of...constructing who one is" (63). In A Thousand Plateaus, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari assert the "collective force" (302) of music and its undeniable connection to becoming (299), a creative process that parallels the practice of fandom. Although research has been conducted regarding deceased musical icons such as Elvis Presley and the way his fan population has come to exhibit elements of the religious (Doss), there has been little if any academic focus on these same elements within the fan bases of artists currently making music. Given the political and social force wielded by religious organizations in society and the huge platform afforded contemporary artists, neglecting

to examine the fan groups of current pop musicians as religious marks the critical gap in scholarship this research seeks to bridge.

By analyzing the relationship between Lady Gaga and her fans, this work will show not only the ways popular music fan cultures can reflect dimensions of the religious, but also what the existence of these dimensions means in a broader social context for the fans themselves. Just as religion is an identity and community structuring institution, so too does fandom shape those who practice it, making it crucial to examine how celebrities and the wider entertainment industry construct and maintain fans as such. Although fandom is often theorized as an emancipatory practice whereby individual subjects use cultural products to create “meanings of self, of social identity and social relations,” (Fiske Understanding Popular Culture 10) for themselves, the power of corporate bodies to mediate and direct those uses must not be ignored. The research that follows will seek then not only to answer the question of how Lady Gaga and her fan base exhibit elements of the religious, but also what the implications are for understanding this type of relationship in this way.

It must be noted that, much like any church congregation, no fan group is a homogenous mass, with each individual fan feeling and exhibiting identical levels of devotion. Rather, every fan community exists along a continuum, with some members far more invested than others. For example, though I consider myself a casual fan of Lady Gaga and have, in the course of my research, spent many hours immersed in the work she produces, I have no personal connection to Gaga or her fan community. For the purposes of our study, we shall focus on those fans of Lady Gaga who would self-identify as ‘little monsters,’ the pet name given by Gaga to members of her tribe. Although the analysis

that is to follow is concerned with only the most faithful members of one singular fan community, it nonetheless offers a framework by which future scholars can theorize other intense fandoms and the subjectivities they produce in fans.

Aside from the exceptional popularity of Lady Gaga as a musician, artist and public figure, the connection that she encourages with her fans seems markedly different from that of other entertainers. The relationship between Lady Gaga and her fan base is thus a particularly interesting object of reflection around which to focus. In interviews, Lady Gaga makes no secret of her desire to be seen as an Icon of religious proportions for her little monsters, going so far as to express a desire to die a martyr for her fans (Diehl 283). As for those fans, a cursory glimpse at the forum on her official website highlights how fans credit Gaga with, amongst other things, helping them feel comfortable being themselves, offering a philosophy by which to live a happy life, and even saving lives (SethMonster12). Lady Gaga is thus clearly positioned, and indeed positions herself, as leader and a source of meaning and direction in the lives of her fans.

Unlike the average celebrity, Lady Gaga's rhetoric is never simple or straightforward. Though widely known in the media as 'Mother Monster' leading her children to salvation in a future where difference is celebrated rather than ridiculed, when relating more directly to her fans Lady Gaga often assumes a less active role, suggesting herself as simply a member of the (fan) community of like-minded social outcasts that has formed around her (LadyGaga 5 November). Her practice of following many of those who follow her on the social networking site Twitter goes so far as to position Lady Gaga as a fan of her fans, marking an inversion of the traditional relationship between fan and figurehead, or at least placing Gaga and her fans on the same level and suggesting a



collapse of the natural estrangement between icon and fan.

Egalitarian though her rhetoric may be, Lady Gaga is also a brand. Regardless of how special the relationship between she and her 'little monsters,' Gaga is a creator of cultural commodities and thus firmly a part of the capitalist system. While from one side of her mouth Lady Gaga preaches equality between herself and her fans, from the other she implicitly demands her audience remain subjugated to her by purchasing that which she produces. Considering Lady Gaga as a commodity is of particular interest to this study in that it serves the function of sustaining the estrangement between icon and fan necessary in order for the continued existence of Gaga's fan base, and indeed Lady Gaga as a distinct entity herself.

### Literature Review

Much of the theoretical base from which this work will follow is drawn from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's 1980 tome A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Chapter ten of this work, entitled "Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible..." introduces two concepts that are central to our understanding of the fan-icon relationship: the anomalous and becoming-animal. In the most general sense, the figure of the anomalous is representative of the idol or icon, while the process of becoming, though suggested by the idol, belongs to the fan. Unpacking these terms will create a space in which work from the sociology of religion, fan studies and critical theory can come together to create a framework in which to theorize and evaluate the relationship between Lady Gaga and her fans.

The idea of becoming is not easily defined, which points towards how other to the dominant understanding of the world the notion is. In their discussion of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari posit the existence of two planes, the organizational plane and the plane of composition or consistency (267-8). The plane of organization is the plane we occupy in our day-to-day lives; always concerning "the development of forms and the formation of subjects" (265), it is where you and I exist as separate entities, where social structures and institutions are rigid and fixed, where evolutionary development is the means by which life is propagated. This plane is laid atop the plane of consistency, where there is no structure or genesis, just "relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness" (267). On this second plane, fixed subjects disappear in favour of unformed elements (266) and evolution gives way to involution, a process "in which form is constantly being dissolved" (267) in favour of undifferentiated matter. Careful to be

clear with the idea that becomings “are neither dreams nor phantasies,” but rather “perfectly real” (238), Deleuze and Guattari note that though there is always interplay between the two planes, with the plane of organization constantly attempting to codify the plane of consistency, it is on this second plane, a “plane of immanence” (266), that becoming occurs.

Put as simply as possible, the process of becoming is unformed elements from distinct entities on the plane of organization coming into relation with one another on the plane of consistency and ultimately bringing about an “irreducible dynamism” (237) that cannot be explained by any school of rational, scientific thought. To enter into a becoming is to experience interstitiality, a moment of freedom from form where one is neither that which she is on the plane of organization nor that which she is entering into relations with; a becoming is thus what Noël Carroll would consider a moment of monstrosity (163). Above all, becoming is a creative process in which filial and hereditary bonds are loosed in favour of connection by alliance and attraction. “Becoming is the process of desire” (272), note Deleuze and Guattari. Ultimately, the importance of desire and attraction in the process of becoming begins to point to how we will connect becoming with the relationship a fan enters into with the object of their adoration.

Having a basic grasp of the concept of becoming, one may rightly begin to ask what the goal of a becoming is. For Deleuze and Guattari, all becomings are “rushing toward becoming-imperceptible...indiscernible...impersonal” (279). Though at first this thought may seem contradictory (for if one is becoming imperceptible surely one is becoming nothing at all), when we remember that becomings occur on the plane of consistency where forms and subjectivities are undone, a different understanding begins

to develop. On the plane of consistency, becoming-imperceptible is nothing short of “becoming everybody/everything” (Deleuze and Guattari 280), or to put it in terms more suitable for our study, becoming communal. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari go so far as to note that to become imperceptible is to “enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator” (280); becoming is therefore ultimately a spiritual process. Though Deleuze and Guattari assert that no becoming can ever be complete (259), the theorized endpoint of the process is to lose one’s subjectivity in favour of communion with everything else in the universe, and therefore with god<sup>1</sup>. It is no coincidence then that Kierkegaard refers to the plane of consistency, location of all becomings, as the “plane of faith” (Deleuze and Guattari 282).

Deleuze and Guattari are emphatic that becomings are non-familial and fundamentally different than any group existing on the plane of organization. They refer to becomings-animal as “dark assemblages” (242) “always on the fringe of recognized institutions” (247) that trouble traditional state and family organizations (242). “A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population” (239) that “proliferate[s] by contagion” (241). Ultimately, then, becomings-animal are always a collective affair. To echo what was said above, it is not through the sexual reproduction of the plane of organization that becoming is initiated, but rather by “temptation” (247), “fascination for the pack” (239-40) or desire. If we were to posit the idea of a becoming-fan, one must be captivated and fascinated by the fan group and the community it promises as well as by the icon in question (who as we shall see is the anomalous of the group), in order to enter into relations with the pack. Though Deleuze and Guattari discuss numerous types of

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, if this theorized endpoint were to be reached, God would cease to be God as an individual subject or idea.

becomings, becoming-animal is especially relevant to the fan-Icon relationship, given the importance of community and the pack mode to fan groups.

Becomings-animal, much like fanatical groups, are threatening to social institutions on the plane of organization, and are thus always appropriated by societies in order to break them down and explain them away (Deleuze and Guattari 247-8). One of the ways becomings are neutered by society is through organizational structures such as family, state, and religion existent on the plane of organization (248); in the case of the church, Deleuze and Guattari note the destruction or reintegration of becomings-animal by religious institutions, and suggest that these becomings are “toned down” until their “only remaining relation to animals is strangely familiar, domestic” (248). Recalling that becomings are a spiritual process, a distinction suggested earlier becomes clearer: religion and the spiritual, contrary to what the church would like us to believe, are distinct entities. Religion, borne of the plane of organization, was created by humanity to explain away the inexplicability and prevent any possibility of a true becoming, and as a means of neutering the true spirituality of community achieved by becomings on the plane of faith.

Echoing Deleuze and Guattari, French theorist Jean-Luc Nancy, in his essay “Of Divine Places,” suggests that it is religion that prevents humanity from achieving true community, by maintaining and simultaneously purporting to work in favour of dismantling the estrangement between man and god. Though it uses a different vocabulary in discussing divinity, estrangement and community, Nancy’s work nonetheless supports Deleuze and Guattari’s idea that naming and dividing the world up serves to estrange one being from another. For Nancy, this estrangement effectively

creates god and man as subjects entirely other to one another, thus negating the possibility of community, something that Nancy considers truly divine. Adamant that under organized religion “men and women are men and women and the gods are the gods. They are distinct and can never mix” (142), Nancy’s conceptions of community and divinity are, in effect, Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming; it is through a becoming, an effacement of subjects and forms, that humankind comes into true relations with both the divine and his fellow man. Doing away with subjectivity means that man and god “cease to...be disclosed to each other as strangers,” and “the god disappears” (Nancy 124), leaving behind a community in relation with itself rather than “a group of men facing its gods” (Nancy 143). Nancy’s notion that it is with the disappearance of god that a divine space of community is opened up is in alignment with Deleuze and Guattari’s affirmation of the spiritual dimension of the process of becoming.

The divinity inherent in community and the spiritual nature of the process of becoming marry in the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim. In The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, a comprehensive study of the religious practices of Australian and American tribal groups, Durkheim seeks to discover and explore the most basic religious nature of mankind (13), and comes to conclude that the religious impulse is borne from the impulse to be social or in community. Although Deleuze and Guattari contend that primitive totemic groups belong more to the plane of organization than becomings (237), Durkheim’s study of totemism nonetheless provides an interesting bridge between the abstraction of the plane of faith and the concrete plane of organization, as well as between the religious impulse and organized religion.

Both becomings and totemic clans are non-familial groups; Durkheim suggests

that totemic clans are more primitive than families (196) and that they belong less to the plane of organization. While Deleuze and Guattari posit becoming as a process initiated because of an attraction to the pack, Durkheim notes that totems are often passed by chance or some “special processes” (128) rather than along paternal or maternal lines. Those practicing totemic religions believe “each individual has a double nature...two beings coexist[ing] within him, a man and an animal,” (157) and thus that “a man who belongs to the Crow clan has within him something of this animal” (175). Under these religions “members of each clan seek to give themselves external aspects of their totem,” including tattoos, burns, pelts, headdresses and jewellery (137). Rather than neutering the becoming-animal aspects of totemism, rituals are designed to increase the level of relation between man and his totemic animal or vegetable and indeed instigate a metamorphosis (250). To adopt the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, totemic rituals are “transports of enthusiasm” (Durkheim 246) designed to bring the unformed elements of the members of a given clan into relation with their totem and give participants a moment of transcendence<sup>2</sup> where they do not recognize themselves as individual subjects (249).

The universality of totemic religions also echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming. Where for Deleuze and Guattari, the endpoint of all becomings is to enter into communion with all else in the universe including god (Deleuze and Guattari 280), Durkheim proposes that in totemic religions there is a belief that each clan comprises part

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<sup>2</sup> My use of the concept of transcendence throughout this work is meant to suggest that the process of becoming involves a necessary eradication of the boundaries of the self, encouraging a communion with others. Transcendence here is aligned with the freeing self-actualization of becoming, and not with the notion of a transcendent God or a form of capture on the plane of organization.

of a whole (180), and that everything known to mankind is ultimately connected (166). Durkheim's clan is analogous to the pack of Deleuze and Guattari, and inter-clan relations are analogous to the continuum of becoming-animal (Deleuze and Guattari 248), with both concepts culminating in the effacement of difference between and amongst subjects and species, deities and mortals. In totemic religions the idea that god is entirely other to the clan and its members is effaced in favour of the belief that "there is...nothing which does not receive...something of a religious character" (179). Thus, although totemism is distinct from Deleuze and Guattari's process of becoming, as it is a primitive example of an organized religion, it nonetheless shares important characteristics with becoming and provides a concrete framework on which to build a study of fandom's connection to the religious.

Evidence of becoming and its connection to both community and the religious impulse is also present in works that study the effects of popular music on audiences. Tia DeNora's Music In Everyday Life argues that although listening practices are contemporarily more private than they once were, music is still largely a tribal or communal affair (155) that works to nullify subjectivity (55) in favour of a transcendent state (62). More specifically relevant to this study, Robin Sylvan's Traces of the Spirit: The Religious Dimensions of Popular Music seems to suggest becoming in its discussion of the ways that "musical experience allows for transcendence of subject-object, body-mind, spiritual-material dualities" (6), and Sylvan's exploration of West-African tribal communities links becoming nicely to the work of Durkheim by affirming that ritual practices are designed to aid individual tribe members in achieving interstitiality between self and deity (23). His work also notes the becoming-adult of the adolescent and how



this moment of interstitiality increases the desire for solidarity and community (75), connecting this to the proliferation of fan groups amongst teenagers and young adults. Sylvan ultimately comes to make explicit the relation between popular music, the plane of faith and the religious impulse toward community, suggesting, “music allows people to become part of this unified field in which the spiritual dimension is directly experienced as a powerful state” (215).

Finally, literature from the field of fan studies suggests a connection between Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of becoming and the drive for community. Historically, theories of fandom sought to negate the possibility of community or transcendence through immersion in media texts; Joli Jenson’s “Fandom as Pathology: The Consequences of Characterization” details how fandom has often been imagined in a negative light as the result of a decline of true community under mass culture (14), with the fan positioned as a loner who enters into an “intense fantasy relationship” (11) with a celebrity, the goal of which was “to feel an illusory sense of community” (19). Other work suggests fan groups as tribe-like (Doss; Bennett Popular Music) communities engaged in a transformative practice, the goal of which is transcendence, or “breaking down the barrier between self and...star” (Abercrombie and Longhurst 151-2). Lisa Lewis notes that a shared sense of identity (qtd. in Negus 26) between fan, fan group and performer is the major impetus for most individuals to become involved in fan cultures. It is perhaps Henry Jenkins who comes closest to using the terminology of becoming in a discussion of fandom when he notes that fan groups come together not based on shared biological or social traits such as gender, race, or politics, but rather an affinity for a particular individual or set of texts (“Strangers No More” 213). Ultimately, the study of

the relationship between Lady Gaga and her fans that follows will provide a more explicit analysis of how the practices of fandom align with the communal process of becoming.

The idea of a fascination for the pack in the process of becoming has been addressed above in the discussion of the ways that the religious impulse is largely a function of the impulse to be social. Part of the fascination for the pack is borne of a fascination for what Deleuze and Guattari call the “anomalous”, an “exceptional individual” (243) who “is a position or set of positions in relationship to a multiplicity” (244). In order to initiate the process of becoming one must enter into a pact or alliance with the anomalous, a figure that is simultaneously “the leader...the Loner...the Demon...the higher power” (243-4), “a phenomenon” (245), “the sorcerer” (246) and “the borderline” (245) of every pack. The anomalous is a figure that both haunts the fringes (246) and leads the pack.

Two notes about the anomalous and its relation to the larger pack are relevant for our study. The first, that “the elements of the pack are only imaginary ‘dummies’...all that counts is the borderline – the anomalous” (245) points to the fact that in studying a group phenomenon it is crucial to reflect upon the most important figure in the group rather than the group itself or any individual member of the pack. For Deleuze and Guattari, the important figure is the anomalous; in the analysis that is to follow, that figure is Lady Gaga. As mother monster to her fans, Lady Gaga inhabits a set of positions relative to her pack that mirror Deleuze and Guattari’s multiple positions of the anomalous. This is not all to suggest that the members of the Lady Gaga fan pack are irrelevant to our study, only that in order to understand the pack as a whole, one must first “strike” at the borderline (Deleuze and Guattari 245) of the pack – the anomalous.

The second relevant detail regarding the anomalous is related to the multiple positions held by such an entity. Deleuze and Guattari note that the anomalous “belongs first of all to a group united to the group over which...she exercises influence” (246); the anomalous is thus related and indebted more strongly to a group that is other than the pack that she leads and is a borderline of. Using as an example the proliferation of werewolves, Deleuze and Guattari further suggest that it is the reaction of the alliance with a second family that produces werewolves (246) and not the anomalous herself. To translate to the language of our own study, this would suggest the celebrity icon as indebted first and foremost not to her fans, but rather to another related group, and that it is in fact this unnamed other group that inspires the commencement of becoming.

For Emile Durkheim, this unnamed other group is in fact the clan itself (236-7). His study of totemism comes to the ultimate conclusion that the power of a totemic symbol is in fact the “universal power” (224) of society and not any intrinsic quality of the totem itself (236), though the members of a totemic religion are unaware of this fact. According to Durkheim, this unawareness is crucial because the moment members of society awake to the fact that the power invested in a totem and the totemic being “emanate[s] from society, then the mythological system...would never be born” (239). In other words, though the strength of any given religion comes from the believers rather than the figurehead or god, the moment this is realized, both god and religion collapse.

To link Durkheim’s study more directly to the concept of the anomalous we can posit the totem itself as anomalous. In totemic religions, sacred items are only differentiated from the profane insofar as society designates them as such (236), and thus the totem occupies multiple positions for those practicing its religion, as it is both of the

clan and a sacred being or object (175). Further, the totem is both specific and general; that is, although totems are most often a species or variety of plant or animal, they are occasionally more individuated, with a particular and singular object functioning as totem (125) for a clan. A third quality of the totem that suggests it as an anomalous figure is the fact that images and icons that represent the totem are seen to be as sacred as is the existence of the totemic being in nature (150). Finally, the existence of the totem in each member (157) attests to the fact that the totem occupies multiple positions both within and for the clan.

Leaving the realm of theory, the idea of the anomalous can be seen in a significant amount of fan studies; many theorists have noted how celebrities occupy “a set of positions” (Deleuze and Guattari 244) in relation to their fans and the general public. John Ellis’ “Stars as a Cinematic Phenomenon,” contends that celebrities are simultaneously ordinary and extraordinary (91), “very special beings and...beings just like” (94) their fans. For Ellis, “the star...leads a life like other people...is present in the same social universe as [the audience]...At the same time the star is extraordinary, removed from the life of mere mortals...separate from the world” (97) of their audience. The malleability of the star persona is of particular interest to Barry King; in “Embodying an Elastic Self: The Parameters of Contemporary Stardom,” King suggests that stars today are “anything that the occasion demands” (45), willing to ground their identity in multiple locations based on the whims of audience and industry (49-51). John Fiske’s study of the cultural economy of fandom posits that fans are comfortable with the malleability of their idols, at once revering and adoring them from afar and believing that they possess them as one would an object (40). Other work notes how fans help shape

the wider meanings afforded to stars (Negus 26), the various positions accorded to stars from both within and external to their fan communities (Schulze, White and Brown 15), and how the star is constructed as an interstitial mediator between mortal and god (Doss 70).

Echoing Erika Doss, some further work within the fields of fan studies and studies of popular music also suggests the Idol occupying the position of anomalous mediating between two groups. Where Deleuze and Guattari note that the anomalous as sorcerer belongs first to a group other than her pack, this literature highlights how idols “on the one hand serve the...industry and on the other the...fans” (Fiske 47). Robin Sylvan examines this as well, concluding that contemporary music is so deeply embedded in capitalism, commercialization, and commodification that it becomes difficult to see the ways that this dual role of the star manifests itself (219), adding to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the anomalous as “linear yet multiple” (Deleuze and Guattari 244).

The existence of the anomalous or idol in multiple locations and subject positions both close to and removed from their pack or fans ultimately brings us back to Jean-Luc Nancy and his discussion of god’s presence and simultaneous absence in the world (Nancy 123). Nancy suggests that god is both “manifestly invisible and invisibly manifest” (124), present in everything but inaccessible to the logic of humankind. God is thus an anomalous. Deleuze and Guattari assert that the anomalous is not “the perfection of a type incarnate,” does not present “specific or generic characteristics” and “is neither an individual or a species” (244), but is rather “a phenomenon” (245); these attributes (or lack thereof), along with the thinkers’ previously noted consideration of the anomalous as a “higher power” (243) already suggests that figure as a being that denies the

categorizations of the plane of organization. Related to this is Nancy's assertion that god is "the negation of his own particularity" (149), the refusal to accept a specific subject position or definition in favour of being everywhere and nowhere, in everything but invisibly so. This refusal, akin to the abstraction of the plane of faith, is from whence comes organized religion's conception of god as estranged and unknowable to humankind, and indeed what creates god as a god in the usual sense.

Moving forward from the anomalous and becoming, Nancy's assertion an estrangement must exist between human subjects and she who is deemed divine is the final theme upon which this study shall rest. Though Nancy's idea has been discussed briefly above, as a means of drawing together what has come before, we leave the plane of faith for the plane of organization and examine estrangement in the maintenance of organized religions and the star system.

In structuring religion hierarchically, humankind has created and widened the gap between sacred and profane (Luckmann 63), man and god. Nancy stresses that in order for organized religion to exist this must be the case, that man must "find a place at some remove in order to say of the gods that they are gods" (114). With the most primitive religions, however, this was not the case; although tribal totems "fulfil exactly the same function of the divine personalities of more complex religions" (Durkheim 179), a much closer relationship between devotees and deities is evidenced in totemic religions, with estrangement being nearly eradicated in favour of a "shared nature" (Durkheim 157). Though his study shows some difference in the level of spiritual power between clan members, images of the totem and the totemic animal itself, Durkheim is careful to note that clan members' religious character is not "materially inferior to that...observed in the

animal” (156). In its most basic form then, religion does not seek to segregate humankind from knowledge and relations with the divine force (Durkheim 217) or its earthly representations. It is through increasing institutionalisation and the localizing of religion in special institutions (Luckmann 66-7) that tension between man and his god is borne and aggravated. Thomas Luckmann, in his study The Invisible Religion, notes this and suggests that the Judeo-Christian religions have evolved in such a way so that the isolation of sacred from profane is the sharpest the world has ever seen (67).

In much the same way as religion, the entertainment industry segregates performer from audience, icon from fan. David Buxton, author of “Rock Music, the Star System, and the Rise of Consumerism,” notes that for the star system to exist “the star must be known without reciprocation by a mass of individuals whose only common point lies in being represented by the same star” (430), simultaneously reversing and echoing Nancy’s remarks about god’s necessary estrangement from man. Although the icon may seem “to be a guarantee of community” (Buxton 436) to a fan, the dominant culture strives to maintain a distance between the two (Fiske 41). When Nancy’s theory regarding god’s estrangement is mobilized within this discourse, the icon remains unknowable and thus an icon to her fans. The star’s role in this process ought not to be underestimated. Barry King, in his discussion of contemporary stardom’s workings, notes that, like god’s “negation of his own particularity” (Nancy 149), today’s celebrities are “permanently resetting the terms of their representation” (King 52) in service of maintaining their distance from the audience. In fact, the ever-increasing amounts of personal information available for consumption actually aids in the maintenance of this distance, in that it ensures fans remain engaged in the hunt for the key to a celebrity’s

identity (King 51) rather than pausing to question the validity of the very system they are complicit in.

If the entertainment industry does to fans what organized religion does to believers, segregating fan from icon and blocking the possibility of a becoming between the two, does there remain the opportunity for transcendence through the practice of fandom? This question is to be the central preoccupation of the study of Lady Gaga and her 'little monsters' that is to follow. Through an analysis of the structure of this relationship as it is suggested by Lady Gaga's videos for "Paparazzi," "Born This Way" and "Judas," we will explicate and evaluate the possibilities that exist for Lady Gaga fans to come into community with each other through their fandom.



### Methodology

This research will be carried out using two interrelated qualitative methods: parallel recursive and deconstructive discourse analysis. Parallel recursive analysis is a research method designed by Korinne Weima, a 2008 graduate of the Child and Youth Studies Master's program at Brock University. In her thesis, Weima used parallel recursive analysis as a means of bringing cohesion to a seemingly disparate chorus of voices within her work. Given the broad base of previously existing research from which this project will grow, a parallel recursive approach is an appropriate way to structure our analyses, for it will allow each strand of research to stand alone, illuminating one facet of the argument to be produced, while at the same time contributing to the overall construction and cohesion of the work.

In terms of detailing the specific method of parallel recursive analysis, Weima uses the metaphor of a braid, suggesting that by weaving fragments of writing in and out of her work, she is able to produce a "continually thickening parallel analysis" (26) of the object of her reflection. In much the same way, this work will use her method as a means of accessing, combining, and "imploding" (Weima 26) fragments of each primary theoretical text, as well as the texts under analysis, into one another. To offer a more concrete example, having established an understanding of Lady Gaga as a figure of religious proportions for her fans, this work will bring forth Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the anomalous as occupying multiple positions in relation to the pack (244) as a means of problematizing this construction of Lady Gaga, only to return to Gaga's positioning as a deity for her fans in order to discuss her contradictory position as a commodity.

Weima notes that in her work, “format and methodology are intimately related” (26), and the same is true of the research that is to follow. While parallel recursive analysis accounts for the structure of our analysis, much of the interpretive work will be done using a Derridian form of deconstructive discourse analysis, a method explicated by Catriona Macleod in “Deconstructive Discourse Analysis: Extending the Methodological Conversation.”

Discourse analysis assumes that all “communicative events...constitute a particular way of talking about and understanding the world” (Griffin 91), and have the effect of constructing social identities, structuring relationships between people and legitimizing systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough qtd. in Macleod 7). A research method that seeks to understand the ways humans build their world and make meaning through the use of language, discourse analysis is an unpacking in service of discovering the assumptions, biases and power structures at work below the surface of any given text.

As laid out by Macleod, the Derridian approach to deconstructive discourse analysis attempts to point out the ways that what one does not say is fundamentally related to what one does say (20), with the goal of making present that which is absent or hidden in a text. By uncovering the absent, the text in question can be destabilized, allowing for alternate meanings to arise (Macleod 25). Macleod cites Ian Parker’s formulation of Derrida’s *sous rature* as providing a three-stage process by which to accomplish this. Those stages are: identify an opposition and show how one of the polarities is dominant; subvert the dominance by illustrating the ultimate arbitrariness of that dominance, and; sabotage the continuation of the opposition. To use terms more familiar to this research, Parker’s three-stage process of deconstructive discourse analysis

will be used to unearth that which is systematically concealed about Lady Gaga and the relationship she has with her fans by analyzing what is revealed about the relationship. This will destabilize the discourse of the Lady Gaga-fan relationship, creating a space in which this research can provide a nuanced reading of that relationship.

### Paparazzi

Lady Gaga says of her work that she doesn't "write records and then decide what the video will look like...it's a complete vision, the song and the visual...all come...at once" (Slomowicz 2), so that although others may be a part of the creation process, the final product is distinctly hers. As such, unlike the music videos of many other artists, it is possible and indeed very fruitful to analyze the visuals that accompany Lady Gaga's singles as a facet of her overall project.

## I

There can be no denying that fandom and fame are inextricably linked, and although the fan-icon relationship lies at the heart of this research, it is useful to examine Lady Gaga's relation to fame itself as a means of beginning to unpack the complex interplay between she, her fame and her fans. Nothing produced by Gaga puts forth as complete a picture of this relation than "Paparazzi," the fourth and final North American single from her 2008 debut The Fame. Directed by Jonas Akerlund, the music video for "Paparazzi" is essentially a short film detailing the rise, fall and resurrection of a star desperate to hang onto her fame. In the most general sense, the very fact that the video is presented as a miniature movie complete with title cards and end credits suggests a connection between Lady Gaga and Hollywood actors, who, as Barry King suggests, are "prepared to be anything as the occasion demands" (45), rather than presenting a fixed persona to their public. Indeed, it is Lady Gaga's ability and unceasing practice of re-positioning herself that will provide a leaping off point from which to begin our analysis.

John Ellis notes that stars are perceived as "very special beings and beings just

like the reader” (94), existing in both the mundane world of the everyday and in an isolated, impenetrable world apart from mere mortals. This world apart is emphasized in “Paparazzi” by the fact that neither Gaga nor her paramour speaks English, isolating the viewer from the lovers from the moment the video begins. The visual component of “Paparazzi” initially positions Lady Gaga as the prototypical isolated starlet, hidden from the world in a gleaming white fortress-like mansion by the sea, bringing to mind John Fiske’s assertion that official barriers between fan and icon exist because of “the dominant culture’s need to maintain the disciplinary distance between text and reader” (41). Paradoxically, the song’s lyrics suggest Gaga as embodying the role of a paparazza, a figure Eddie McCaffray in his analysis of the video calls the “best fan” (“Grammar Trouble”). By personifying both positions, according to musicologist Ayah Rifai, Gaga “smartly crafts our responses to and interpretations of her” through the song’s lyrical content while visually maintaining a victimhood at the hands of media scrutiny and fame.

To take Rifai’s assertion one step further, by taking on multiple subject positions, “Paparazzi” finds Lady Gaga working at destabilizing the roles of both celebrity and fan to show how the two seemingly oppositional figures rely on one another for survival. On one level, this would seem to be hinting at an admission on Gaga’s part that she “*is* only insofar as she exists before the eyes of the public” (Bedard, “Can’t Read My Poker Face”) and her fans, refashioning those fans (and the media) into her co-creators. While the act of raising her little monsters to the status of co-creators suggests Lady Gaga’s project as one of self-effacement in favour of Jean-Luc Nancy’s conception of true community, the visuals of “Paparazzi” – namely the desire for celebrity at all costs (the video concludes with Lady Gaga murdering her boyfriend to remain newsworthy) –

betray a longing on the part of Lady Gaga to be set apart from and above those who would follow her until she loves them. Constructed thusly, "Paparazzi" strikes to the heart of the hidden conflict within Lady Gaga's overall project.

Contemplating "Paparazzi" Eddie McCaffray asks, "when the stalker and stalkee, paparazza and popstar, are so closely adapted to one another, who holds the power?" ("Grammar Trouble") It is this question that will propel us into analysis in earnest. The central opposition in "Paparazzi" is between celebrity and paparazzi, and as we have already noted, it is reasonable to consider the paparazzi as representative of the hyper-fan. Although Lady Gaga adopts both positions in "Paparazzi," it is my contention that both lyrically and visually, celebrity is put forth as dominant to the figure of the fan. In the pages that follow, we shall seek to tease out the ways this dominance is evidenced.

The fact that the music video is framed as a film offers our initial hint that celebrity is favoured over fandom in "Paparazzi." While Lady Gaga's earlier videos primarily feature the artist delivering her lyrics to the camera and thus directly to viewers, the pretence of a film adds a second degree of estrangement between artist and fan, highlighting the artist as active compared with the fan as passive. Thinkers as far back in history as Plato have noted the passive role of the spectator, and while recent scholars such as John Fiske and Henry Jenkins suggest spectatorship and fandom as a productive pursuit, there is credence to the argument that audience members are relatively passive participants in their viewing. Like Plato's prisoners in the Allegory of the Cave, viewers of "Paparazzi" are bound, seeing only what the camera wishes them to see, firmly placing spectator below actor on the chain of hierarchy. In much the same way, although the paparazzi may be active in their pursuit of the perfect photograph, they are nonetheless

bound by the actions of the celebrity that they seek, thus placing their own agency hierarchically below that of their subject. Finally, the title cards announcing ‘starring Lady Gaga’ (0:25) and ‘Lady Gaga in’ (0:42) further increase the estrangement between Gaga and those viewing “Paparazzi,” raising her as celebrity still farther above viewer as fan. Though she is the subject of the camera’s gaze and the gaze of her fans, she is anything but subject to these gazes, instead exhibiting her agency in the face of that which seeks to capture and domesticate her, never more explicitly so when she dons an ensemble made of unspooled rolls of film (5:02).

A second substantiation for the privilege of celebrity over fan is evidenced in how Lady Gaga appears in the video. When playing celebrity, Gaga does not deliver “Paparazzi’s” lyrics save for one chorus, instead remaining firmly in the narrative of the film as one who is victimized by the paparazzi. Conversely, Gaga as narrator and fan is largely confined to an ornate sofa, lip-synching for the camera. To return once more to the question of action versus passivity then, Gaga-as-celebrity within the narrative is far more active than her narrator counterpart, who, though she writhes and reaches, never rises from her assigned location or ceases to be a ventriloquist’s puppet.

Further emphasizing the song’s subordination of the paparazzi or fan figure in favour of the celebrity is the way physical affection is filmed. Gaga-as-celebrity is shot romantically embracing her boyfriend in a bedroom, and although there is clearly a power imbalance between the two – he pushes Lady Gaga from the balcony, nearly killing her (1:55) – the affection is reciprocal and loving. Compare this with the way Gaga-as-fan experiences physical affection: on the aforementioned sofa, mauled and mauling three androgynous men who have the look of musicians about them. These embraces are shot

with an eye to more carnal pleasures than those experienced by Gaga-as-celebrity, and although here Gaga-as-fan plays an active role, the scene suggests the figure of a groupie who is willing to give anything of herself to attain communion with the object of her fandom. Ultimately, then, Gaga-as-fan is read as lowering herself, prostrate at the feet of that which she worships: celebrity.

One might be tempted to argue the figure of the fan is dominant in “Paparazzi” for the simple reason that it is from her point of view that the aural narrative unfolds. Lyrically the celebrity is silent save from four lines in the bridge, which would seem to suggest that figure as subordinate to the narrative voice of the paparazza-cum-fan, however the video thoroughly undermines that possibility. Ayah Rifai notes that the visual component of “Paparazzi” lacks “any singular or memorable depictions of a paparazzo”; though there is a multiplicity of paparazzi in the video, they are nameless and essentially faceless, reduced to little more than camera flashes. The fact that the role Gaga takes on in the visual narrative is the sung about celebrity rather than the singing fan further emphasizes the celebrity as the figure of import in “Paparazzi”.

It is not only the song’s lyrical point of view that cements celebrity as the dominant figure in “Paparazzi”; the lyrics themselves assert the hunted idol as a central preoccupation and hence the figure of primary importance in the narrative. While the narrative voice uses the first person, the focus is entirely on the other – the celebrity – as giving purpose and direction to the narrator’s existence. Lyrics such as “Need that picture of you,” “there’s no other superstar,” and the desperate, “I’ll follow you until you love me,” paint the narrator once again as having laid herself prostrate before the object of her obsession; this last example also suggests a devoted disciple on a pilgrimage



towards communion with an idol of religious proportions. The narrator of “Paparazzi” is pushing herself into the world of her icon, using “we,” “us,” and the phrase “I’ll be your girl,” but there is no indication, save for “this photo of us,” that a two-way relationship exists between celebrity and fan. Although the lyrics hint at the aforementioned creation of the celebrity by media and fans in suggesting “Baby you’ll be famous,” as a result of the paparazza’s project, the narrator takes no actual credit for this, again denying her role for the benefit of the celebrity. Ultimately, then, not only is the figure of the fan subordinate to that of the celebrity, but the fan also plays a willing and active role in this subordination, thereby maintaining their estrangement from the object of their desire.

Arguments positioning fan as subordinate to celebrity can be found in a great deal of early work in fan studies, often intimating that the fan-icon relationship is one of a religious character. Joli Jenson, in her history of the school of research, notes how fans have often been perceived as “victims” (14) of mass culture and the star system (10) where fans reach out to public figures as a means of making “up for all that modern life lacks” (16), namely strong community institutions such as organized religion. Under mass culture, fans feel a sense of spiritual “reverence, even adoration” towards the object of their affection, but also that they somehow “possess that object” (Fiske 40), suggesting the icon as both “ordinary and extraordinary” (Ellis 91).

The simultaneous reverence for and assumed possession of a celebrity icon illuminates the connection between organized religion and fandom; in both cases, institutions and those in control of them simultaneously offer up the icon as a commodity and seek to maintain the estrangement between devoted and devotee. David Buxton and Robin Sylvan both note the intimate relation between popular music fandom and

consumer culture (Buxton 429; Sylvan 219), which effectively keeps fans at least financially subject to the object of their affection. In much the same way, the institutionalisation of religion, according to Thomas Luckmann, increases the gap between sacred and profane, creating “inequality in terms of spiritual knowledge” (65) amongst the devoted and making those with less knowledge subject to those with more.

Perhaps the most explicit evidence for fandom as similar to organized religion is Sylvan’s assertion that fan groups practice “deifying their musical heroes and engaging in...a form of worship” (72). Considering this alongside the fervour with which little monsters put their “paws up” (LadyGaga 16 April) for Gaga not only suggests these fans as subject and thus subordinate to Gaga but also Lady Gaga as occupying a position of religious proportion for her fans.

Returning to the idea of icons as both “ordinary and extraordinary” (Ellis 91), John Ellis notes that the desire a fan has to know or possess the object of their affection “is both permitted and encouraged, yet it knows it cannot achieve any tangible form of satisfaction, except the satisfaction of looking” (98-9), which immediately brings to mind Jean-Luc Nancy’s notion of the divine estrangement existent in organized religions (120), where man is subject *to* god rather than in relation *with* god. Further connecting Nancy’s thought with celebrity worship and more specifically with Lady Gaga’s project is the idea that in “Paparazzi,” Gaga is “legitimizing her fame before it has actually occurred” (Rifai). Although the music video was made following the success of three earlier singles, the song was written and recorded before Lady Gaga had much of a fan base, and is thus tantamount to her marking herself as a celebrity. Nancy asserts that the only way “we recognize a god as god...is because it manifests itself as such” (115), which in the

context of “Paparazzi” suggests that Lady Gaga is intentionally creating herself as a goddess for her fans, who are thus necessarily constructed and positioned below her as subjects who will continue to raise her up as the mighty celebrity.

## II

As pronounced as the dominance of celebrity over fan is in “Paparazzi,” the ultimate arbitrariness of this dominance is also suggested by the video, most notably in the way Gaga-as-celebrity craves and indeed needs the attention brought by the media and her fans. Ella Bedard suggests that Gaga “is produced as a result of the devotion and constant attention of her fans” (“Can’t Read My Poker Face”); both within the narrative of “Paparazzi,” and in relevant literature, there is strong evidence that the fan-icon relationship is symbiotic and therefore any perceived or purported dominance of one or the other is constructed and arbitrary.

Beginning with the text, the very narrative structure of the “Paparazzi” music video explicitly details how reliant the figure of the celebrity is on those who are fascinated by her. Essentially detailing the lengths a star will go to in service of hanging on to her fame, “Paparazzi” tells the tale of a starlet who is cast aside by the press following a violent accident, and who murders her boyfriend in cold blood as a means of regaining media attention. The headline ‘Lady No More Gaga’ (2:28) that appears just after her fall from the balcony essentially destroys Gaga’s celebrity identity, propelling her into a desperate bid to recover it.

Eschewing realism in favour of highlighting that Lady Gaga relies as much on the press as much as they rely on her, the moments between when she is pushed from the

balcony and when she lands on the cement are drawn out, and viewers watch as Gaga poses and preens for the paparazzi waiting below (2:01-2:17). Even in the face of potential death, Lady Gaga coyly bites her finger and runs a hand through her platinum blonde hair, remaining every inch the young starlet in front of the cameras. As the shot widens, shifting focus from Gaga's face to her entire corset-clad body, she continues to pose in ever more suggestive ways until she becomes a shadow, twirling down the rabbit hole towards the ground and even worse, potential obscurity.

The narrative resumes as the first verse of "Paparazzi" begins and Lady Gaga is returning home presumably following a hospitalization of some sort. Though she appears to still be suffering injuries, Gaga is dressed to the nines and fully made up as she exits her limousine for her wheelchair (2:31), reminding one of prototypical Hollywood Icon Elizabeth Taylor in the twilight of her life. Prepared for the camera though she may be, the paparazzi have abandoned her and Gaga performs for no one save her household staff.

Both the paparazzi and Gaga-as-celebrity herself are absent from the second verse of the song, which instead features a collection of "dead models" (Rifai) grotesquely positioned and scattered about the grounds of her home. These women, blank eyes staring at some long-gone camera, reinforce that when those accustomed to being photographed on a daily basis are no longer the subject of the camera's gaze, they are unable to exist, further emphasizing the reciprocal need between photographer and subject, fan and icon.

As mentioned previously, there is only one moment in "Paparazzi" where Lady Gaga-as-celebrity delivers the song's lyrics; that moment occurs during the chorus that leads into the bridge, and features Gaga performing directly to the camera (4:25-5:00).

Reading the narrative of the video during the second verse of the song as confirmation of the theory that “the star must be known...by a mass of individuals” (Buxton 430) in order to exist, it is reasonable to read this second chorus as a plea from Gaga-as-celebrity to the paparazzi and thus the public and her fans to come back to her. Although the lyrics in the chorus seem to be directed at the icon from the perspective of the paparazzi or fan, when Gaga-as-celebrity delivers them they take on the opposite meaning; specifically, the phrase “I’ll follow you until you love me, paparazzi,” suggests Gaga as willing to go to any length to secure public interest in her celebrity persona.

In making explicit her need for the attention of photographers and fans, Gaga is further complicating the relation between celebrity and fan, destroying the oft-assumed illusion that fans are somehow less than the celebrities they adore. In the “Manifesto of Little Monsters,” a short text that first appeared in the Book of Gaga, Lady Gaga gives further credit to her fans, writing, “There’s something heroic about...my fans...Like Kings...their prolific nature...both creates and procures what will later be perceived as ‘the kingdom’...I am something of a devoted jester,” suggesting not only that fans have created Lady Gaga the Icon, but also that they ought to somehow be placed above her, the “Kings” to her “jester”. While touring in London in early 2010, Gaga both integrated cameras into her attire and carried a camera with her to photograph those who would photograph her (“Lady Gaga in red outfit.”; “Gaga leaves little doubt she’s a lady.”), upsetting not only the photographer/photographed binary but also “blurring the lines between consumer and producer” (Rifai). In turning the camera lens towards the media and her fans, Lady Gaga makes clear the mutual need that exists between fan and icon outside of “Paparazzi’s” narrative, and indeed highlighting the ultimately arbitrary

subordination of fan to icon that she herself is responsible for maintaining and indeed constructed with the “Paparazzi” visuals.

The symbiotic nature of the fan-icon relationship is played down from an institutional perspective as a means of containing and managing audiences as subject to the commodity status of celebrity. “Paparazzi” does hint at the arbitrary nature of the celebrity-fan hierarchy, and Lady Gaga seems to be both conforming to typical producerly behaviour and rebelling from it in the song. Keith Negus notes how the relationship between fans and their icons is always mediated by the “gatekeepers and intermediaries” (Popular Music in Theory 178) of the entertainment industry, however the icon herself also plays a role.

Many thinkers have detailed how the celebrity is as indebted to the fan as the fan is to the celebrity. Negus himself argues that fans are instrumental in shaping wider cultural meanings attributed to performers (Popular Music in Theory 26), whose goal it is to create a public persona that is “continually interesting to both media personnel and audiences” (“Sexing the Groove” 179), emphasizing the reciprocal reliance between fan and celebrity. Even more explicitly, John Fiske notes the common assumption within fan media that fans are somehow responsible for the stardom of their favourite celebrity (40); more relevant to this study, Fiske, directly contradicting Barry King’s earlier noted contention, suggests that fan knowledge actually lessens the distance between fan and icon (43), mitigating against institutional attempts at maintaining an estrangement. So while the “Paparazzi” video finally finds Lady Gaga as celebrity dominating those who once again clamour for her photograph, this dominance is ultimately arbitrary; the reality is that the fan-icon relationship is far more complex than a simple binary opposition.

### III

The realization that the relation between fan and icon is symbiotic and based on mutual need begs the question of what each party receives from the transaction. We have explicated that the figure of the icon is largely existent because of the attention and adoration of fans, however the previously noted historical contention that fandom is a symptom of the social dysfunction of modern life (Jenson 16) and nothing else leaves much to be said about the identity- and community-building benefits inherent in the act of being a fan. J.H. Bennett considers being a fan as the first step to a healthy, holistic realization of the self (7), while Erika Doss notes that fandom can help individuals cope with daily life (81). Sociologist Tia DeNora asserts that the “reflexive project of the self...rests upon a...conglomerate of social, material and discourse practices” (46). Much fan literature details how this conglomeration comes together in fandom (Fiske; Abercrombie and Longhurst; Jindra), never more than during the collective experience of a live performance, which can act as a site of transcendence (Durkheim; DeNora; Sylvan).

Henry Jenkins posits fandom as “a community of consumers defined through their common relationship with shared texts,” where “the allegiance to fandom often takes precedence over allegiance to particular media texts” (“Strangers No More” 213), suggesting individual icons – the material portion of fandom – as less central than the social and discursive aspects of community building that occurs. To use the terminology adopted by Deleuze and Guattari in their discussion of the potentiality of drug use as a gateway to the plane of faith, this would seem to imply that for fans, the very practices of fandom and not the icon in question is the real drug that allows for transcendence; further

to this, Jenkins' definition intimates that fandom is borne from a "fascination for the pack" (Deleuze and Guattari 239-40) rather than merely a fascination with the icon herself.

Jenkins' notion also gains strong support from the work of Emile Durkheim, who asserts that in primitive religions the totem is representative of the power of the clan and not an inherently sacred object, despite what clan members believe (236-7). Durkheim comes to suggest that if clan members were to become aware it is their own collective social power that powers the totem, that religion would never be born (239). In much the same way, should fans come to understand and own that their icon only exists and has power in as far as they give it to them, fandom itself would collapse, putting at risk the figure of the celebrity and the star system and irrevocably altering the fabric of the entertainment industry. The institutions of the plane of organization thus have a strong investment in appropriating and maintaining the illusion that an opposition exists between fan and icon, and even more so, fans' importance in the entire system, accounting for the common assumption that celebrities are somehow greater than the average human. A closer examination of the way the Lady Gaga-fan relationship functions as a becoming will effectively prevent the continuation of this illusion.

Symbiosis is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "interaction between two different organisms...typically to the advantage of both" ("Symbiosis") and though the term is firmly of the scientific order and thus what Deleuze and Guattari would call the "plane of organization" (267), it is easy to see how the symbiotic relationship between fan and icon relates to the process of becoming. Devin O'Neill, in a fascinating autoethnographic study of his own fandom, has perhaps elucidated the connection



between becoming and Lady Gaga fandom most strongly, claiming, “I have become Lady Gaga, and she has become me. Long live the new flesh” (“GAGAPOLYPSE”). When considered alongside Lady Gaga’s frequent declarations that her fans are a part of her, this suggests that Gaga and her fans are engaged in a process of becoming that alters all parties, and firmly places their relationship on the plane of faith, away from corporate, religious and familial institutions. In other words, though on one hand Lady Gaga positions herself above and apart from her fans in order to gain and maintain her fame, she simultaneously encourages a relation with her fans that defies the very possibility of this estrangement. Having thoroughly explored the former construction of the fan-icon relationship as seen in “Paparazzi,” we can now move to sabotage its continuation by teasing out the latter construction through a brief study of how Lady Gaga and her fans are engaged in a becoming.

The most explicit example of the process of becoming at work between Lady Gaga and her fans is the live concert experience. Since the release of The Fame in 2008, Lady Gaga has mounted two headlining tours, The Fame Ball and The Monster Ball; spectacles both, devout little monsters flock to her live performances, craving what Robin Sylvan calls “the intense initiatic experience, the sense of solidarity and community, the expression” (75) and communion with their Mother Monster. For fans, Lady Gaga has been “slotted into places...usually reserved for religious worship” (“GAGAPOLYPSE”) of the most primitive sort, with the communal experience of live performance as the holy site. Durkheim’s study of tribal religions pays close attention to the “collective transport” (250) of ritual gatherings of this sort, where subject-object, body-mind, and spiritual-material dualities are effaced (Sylvan 6) in favour of the loosed forms and subjects of the

plane of faith (Deleuze and Guattari 266), and the same transport can be seen at performances of The Monster Ball.

Returning for a moment to more solid ground, it is important to remember that while the concert experience is part of the business of the music industry, the transport it can inspire is other to it, operating on the fringe of the institution (Deleuze and Guattari 247), again troubling the simplistic distinction between commerce and the spiritual, or the plane of organization and the place of faith. Deleuze and Guattari are quick to note that institutions have always sought to appropriate and domesticate becomings as a means of neutering their potential to disrupt (247-8) the plane of organization, bringing back to mind Fiske's discussion of the physical barriers often erected to maintain the separation (41) between fan and icon. The constant interplay (Deleuze and Guattari 269) between the plane of organization and the plane of faith, commerce and the spiritual, fan and icon is at the heart of our conception of fandom and the Lady Gaga-fan relationship, and as such will be returned to over and over again throughout the course of this study.

Professional reviews of Lady Gaga's concerts note the "frenzy" (Kramer) fans are whipped into at The Monster Ball, and published fan accounts of the event intimate the experience as one of becoming, telling how Gaga, "made us Little Monsters feel a personal connection with her," and how the Little Monsters became "musically linked...each monster raising their claws" (hareyzzz9255) simultaneously. In a very real sense then, the concert experience involves Little Monsters as a pack (Deleuze and Guattari 239) initially engaging with Lady Gaga as their leader in order to access the haecceity of the plane of faith (Deleuze and Guattari 262), which effectively eradicates the distinction between Gaga and each fan in the audience, exposing each individual to

the other (Nancy 143) and creating true community. No longer a collection of individuals standing “before the face of the god” (Nancy 143), The Monster Ball recreates, if only for its duration, Lady Gaga and her fans as a singular occurrence – a “body without organs,” (Deleuze and Guattari 274) – on the plane of faith.

It is not merely the tribal atmosphere of Lady Gaga’s concerts that suggests her relationship with fans as one of becoming. Durkheim’s study of totemic rituals asserts that clan members “become a new being” during these events, aided in their transformation by the material adornments used (249-50). Although Deleuze and Guattari are emphatic that becomings are not about imitation (274), the practice of costuming one’s self as Lady Gaga which many fans engage in does suggest something of “composing a body with” (274) Gaga. Rather than an imitative practice, we can see costuming as an attempt at “barking...with enough feeling [to]...emit a molecular dog” (Deleuze and Guattari 275), or, to return to Lady Gaga fans, an attempt to make one’s own body “enter the relation of movement and rest” (Deleuze and Guattari 274) of Gaga’s body in her own outlandish costumes. One need only consider Lady Gaga’s infamous meat dress, or her towering eight inch heel-less high heels to understand how a fan dressing him- or herself in similar attire could be equivalent to Deleuze and Guattari’s suggestion of using an apparatus to which an animal is subjected (274) as a means of entering into a becoming. Restrictive, uncomfortable and frankly dangerous as the practice may be, fans routinely style themselves as Lady Gaga (in some cases not only to attend concerts), further supporting the idea that the relationship they have with their Icon as one of becoming.

The preceding may give credence to becoming between fans and Lady Gaga from

the perspective of fans, but what from the perspective of Gaga herself suggests the fan-icon relationship as one of becoming? As suggested by the literature review, the figure of the icon is representative of Deleuze and Guattari's anomalous, the "preferential element in the pack" (244) with whom one must make a pact in order to initiate a becoming. Largely, the anomalous' role in the process of becoming is simply to channel the power of the pack and be fascinating (Deleuze and Guattari 240) to those who are receptive. Immediately, one can connect this to the role of the icon, who strives to be spectacular (King 51) for her public; linking this back to Gaga-as-celebrity in the "Paparazzi" video, the icon must be fascinating to her fans in order to exist. Given her meteoric rise to stardom, the speed at which the media were referring to her as "a cultural and spiritual leader" (Winfrey qtd. in Robinson 282), and her "especially intense relationship with her fans" (Van Meter), it is clear that Lady Gaga is skilled at playing the role of the fascinating anomalous.

Beyond fascinating, Lady Gaga openly encourages fans to enter into a becoming with her. Although this is something we shall discuss in far greater detail in the following chapter, a few words will illustrate this part of Gaga's project in the most basic sense. Even before "Born This Way," the first and title single from Lady Gaga's third studio album was released, much of Gaga's rhetoric suggested a special bond between she and her fans, a connection of an intensity that has perhaps never been seen within popular culture. Journalist Jonathan Van Meter asserts that Gaga and her fans are "overly invested in something that in the end is impossible," and though this might well prove to be the case, it is crucial to note that both parties and not just the fans are engaged in this mysterious something. When she declaims that her fans are writing the kingdom, "the

spiritual hologram of who we perceive ourselves...to become" (Lady Gaga "Manifesto of Little Monsters"), Lady Gaga is not simply holding up her fans as creating her, but suggesting that she and her fans are together engaged in the creative act of birthing the new race that will appear with "Born This Way". One difference then, between Gaga and most other pop stars, lies in the degree to which she is open about the fact that not only is she a gateway to some sort of transcendence for her fans, but that her fans are a gateway for her.

Returning one final time to the intimation in the "Paparazzi" music video that Lady Gaga is at least as reliant on her fans as they are on her, we now come to see the true nature of becoming between Gaga and her fans. In discussing her fame, Gaga says, "It will only change you and affect you if you allow it to" (qtd. in Van Meter) and herein lies the truth behind the rhetoric: Lady Gaga wants to be changed and affected by the devotion of her fans as much as they are changed and affected by her. Gaga has said of her fans that they made her brave (Schoonmaker), and that fans should use her bravery as strength in freeing themselves ("Lady Gaga Presents the Monster Ball Tour"). The something that Lady Gaga and her fans are perhaps overly invested in is the process of becoming-Gaga and all that entails. Far from simply elevating Lady Gaga as an individual to the status of Icon, becoming-Gaga suggests the little monsters as coming to embody Gaga – the self-actualized "superstar" of "Born This Way" – themselves. Although a surface reading of "Paparazzi," and Gaga's role as "leader of the pack" (Deleuze and Guattari 243) might suggest otherwise, achieving this necessitates that the dominance of Icon over fan is eradicated in favour of each party negating their own particularity (Nancy 149) and coming together as one tribe of monsters.

### Born This Way

Speaking about her 2011 release Born This Way, Lady Gaga says that she sees the album as a chance to put her money where her mouth is, “to take the experience of The Monster Ball and...[her] relationship with...[her] fans and make it into a musical experience” (MSNEntertainment), and the album’s title single strives to do just that. Hailed as “the Gospel of Gaga” (Helm) and a “queer friendly self-affirmation anthem” (Mason), “Born This Way” hammers rather than hints at its message (Jonze) of self-acceptance in the face of societal pressure to assimilate. Leaving behind the fame-hungry starlet of “Paparazzi,” and literally adopting the role of “leader of the pack” (Deleuze and Guattari 243), “Born This Way” is thus far Lady Gaga’s most explicit attempt at encouraging a process of becoming between she and her fans. As a means of digging deeper into the relationship between she and her little monsters, it is crucial to interrogate the figure of Mother Monster as well as the implicit message within the mantra “Born This Way”.

## I

In her study of Elvis Presley fandom, Erika Doss suggests that the fan-icon relationship becomes spiritual when practices “affect a transcendent and all-powerful order that has the power to influence life and behaviour” (76). Doss found that Elvis fans see their Icon as a “fellow sufferer” (111-12), a devotion to whom can somehow ease psychic, emotional or spiritual pain (111), and Lady Gaga fans often echo this assertion. The international chain of *Metro* daily newspapers recently held a contest that asked fans to give an account of how they were “Born This Way,” and many entries heralded Gaga as helping them cope with identity difficulties; one entrant, Brad Perrett, claimed,

“because of Lady Gaga I am able to truly be who I am”. In other words, through Lady Gaga, fans free themselves from the shackles of self-doubt and “reject anyone or anything that made [them] feel like [they] don’t belong” (“Lady Gaga Presents the Monster Ball Tour”). This practice amounts to self-actualization, with Lady Gaga as gateway and becoming-Gaga the goal. The process of self-actualization has been hailed as a “universal form of individual religiosity” (Luckmann 70), concretely linking fans’ practice of accepting themselves as being “born this way” with the spiritual. Returning to where our discussion of “Paparazzi,” left off, “Born This Way” suggests that Lady Gaga fans are engaged in the spiritual process of becoming-Gaga, the aim of which is to embody the notion that “we are all born superstars”.

In her analysis of “Born This Way,” Cheryl Helm argues that the song and video are spiritual but “independent of any explicit religion or doctrine,” and that they function as “a catalyst for liberation” rather than oppression. Although Lady Gaga previously made use of explicitly Christian imagery, most notably in the music video for “Alejandro,” “Born This Way” finds Gaga eschewing images of the Catholic Church in favour of a much more eclectic and inclusive pastiche of spiritual imagery. This shift suggests a move away from institutional constraints and hierarchies and towards the sort of religiosity found on Deleuze and Guattari’s plane of faith, and also what Jean-Luc Nancy would consider true religion, the disappearance of subjectivity before the face of a god (140). Considering the shift alongside “Paparazzi,” and its surface hierarchy of icon over fan, “Born This Way” can be read as a confirmation of “Paparazzi’s” hidden assertion that the relation between fan and icon, goddess and devotee, is a symbiotic one based on mutual benefit. But is this really the case? As with all that Lady Gaga does,

“Born This Way” is multi-layered and resists simple analysis. As a means of beginning to probe the hidden depths of Gaga’s anthem of self-acceptance, we will first consider the video’s central opposition between good and evil.

Writing on “Born This Way” and Lady Gaga’s project in general, Devin O’Neill suggests that Gaga traffics in “pop mysticism” that transcends binaries (“Ga Ga Glossolalia”), and though Gaga’s work may not ultimately result in the eradication of binaries, it certainly does complicate simple oppositions, but only after setting these binaries up and suggesting one as dominant to another. The music video for “Born This Way” opens with ‘The Manifesto of Mother Monster,’ a brief voiceover by Lady Gaga that introduces the opposition between good and evil with good as the dominant binary, and this is the portion of the video that offers the most fertile ground for analysis. The good is what Gaga calls “a birth of magnificent and magical proportions...a new race...which bears no prejudice, no judgement but boundless freedom”; in other words, the birth of little monsters as self-actualized, confident in the knowledge that they were “Born This Way”. The evil is not explicitly defined, but one can surmise it to be closed-minded, judgemental and chained by expectation – the polar opposite of the little monsters’ freedom. Further to this, if Gaga’s little monsters and their self-actualization through becoming-Gaga are representative of good, evil can be read as those individuals and institutions of the plane of organization that seek to appropriate, domesticate, break or reduce (Deleuze and Guattari 247-8) the becoming-Gaga of the little monsters.

In the most basic sense, the new race of “Born This Way” is dominant to evil for the simple reason that it is assumed to be good. Called “magnificent” and “magical” by Gaga, the very adjectives assigned to the infinite birth firmly position it as preferable to



the “terrifying birth” of evil. Lyrically, although alluding to “life’s disabilities” leaving some “outcast, bullied or teased,” the song firmly places focus on the good by encouraging listeners to “rejoice and love yourself today ‘cause baby, you were born this way”. If it were not for ‘The Manifesto Of Mother Monster’ that begins the video, the opposition between good and evil would be nothing more than an allusion, for although the existence of evil is hinted at lyrically, neither the song nor the musical portion of the video emphasize evil as a viable choice against the self-actualizing power of the good that is accepting one’s self as being “Born This Way”.

Visually, “Born This Way” positions the Mother Monster’s infinite birth above the “terrifying birth” of evil. Beginning with the most general details, the colour palette is largely restricted to shades of black and white, suggesting the binary of light and dark that is commonly used to represent good and evil. The domination of light over dark is perhaps best illustrated by the video’s representation of the binary opposition between the two “ultimate forces”. The “Eternal Mother,” bathed in purple and blue pastel lights and seated in a gleaming crystalline pyramid, rises above an earth flooded with light (0:24-1:12), while the birth of evil is marked by the use of black and blood red, the personification of evil perched above the earth gone dark (1:29-1:36). The transition between the two figures features naked, writhing, shadowed human bodies washed in a deep red light, which suggests Lady Gaga’s new race of little monsters as being somehow trapped between light and dark, setting up the song that is to follow as a rallying cry for freedom and self-actualization through becoming-Gaga.

Moving beyond the colour palette to the iconography of “Born This Way,” we again see the good of Mother Monster positioned as dominant to the birth of evil. The

primary object associated with evil is a machine gun – an automatic, rapid-fire weapon designed to cause maximum damage to all that it sets its sights on. Contrasted with the butterflies and lotus flowers that surround the Eternal Mother, this invokes the common binaries of creation and destruction, birth and death, each of which reinforces the dominance of good over evil, regardless of the destructive force of evil. Pausing to consider the presence of butterflies in the realm of the Eternal Mother, we are reminded of Lady Gaga's initial performance of "Born This Way" on the 2011 Grammy Awards, where she emerged from what was variously called an egg and a vessel, but what could also be read as a cocoon. Regardless of the interpretation of this prop, the iconography associated with Gaga as Eternal Mother both in the music video and live performances of "Born This Way" suggest the birth of the new race of little monsters as one of goodness, freedom, and a defeat of the forces that seek to chain them.

Although the musical portion of the video for "Born This Way" retains the colour palette of black and white, the appearance of an opposition to the good that is self-actualization through becoming-Gaga is largely absent, save for a very brief appearance of personified evil (5:27). More than simply allowing the binary of good versus evil to fade, the absence of any visual representation of evil forces such as closed-mindedness or judgement suggests that these forces have somehow been conquered by the new race of little monster, further cementing the domination of the transcendence and self-actualization of becoming-Gaga over the rigidity and oppression of the plane of organization. Ultimately, then, "Born This Way" would seem to offer no alternative to the conquering of good over evil.

## II

Few if any would contend that hierarchizing the self-actualization associated with the process of becoming-Gaga above the “evil” of prejudice, judgement and closed-mindedness is arbitrary. Certainly, entering into true community on the plane of faith is to be desired as compared to the institutional oppression found on the plane of organization. Moving below the visible surface of “Born This Way,” however, we begin to see that the relentlessness with which the becoming-Gaga of little monsters is hailed as the way to transcendence hides a much more complex picture of both Lady Gaga and the process of becoming between fan and icon in general. The interconnectedness of the two forces of good and evil that is evidenced in “Born This Way” suggests the relentless insistence of Mother Monster’s domination of evil as false and thus arbitrary.

There is little lyrical evidence that suggests the domination of self-actualization over oppression is arbitrary, pointing to the strength with which that domination is insisted upon in “Born This Way”. Whispered twice at the end of the song but not noted in the official lyrics, the phrase “[s]ame DNA, but born this way,” can be read as a hint that the opposition constructed between good and evil in the video’s ‘Manifesto of Mother Monster’ is a false one. Musically, the emphasis in the phrase “born this way” is on the first syllable, stressing the birth of Gaga’s new race, but a slight shift that places emphasis on the “this” alters the meaning of the phrase and suggests that there are other ways to be born, which in turn proposes identity as existing on a continuum between the poles of good and evil. Though good and evil occupy opposite ends of that continuum, they are part of the same whole – have the “same DNA” – and thus one cannot be separated from the other, much less be fixed in a position of dominance. Easy to miss as

this phrase is, it nonetheless offers a subtle nod to the fact that the insistence of becoming-Gaga as good and dominant is not as uncontested as it would appear.

Like in “Paparazzi,” “Born This Way” finds Lady Gaga as anomalous, occupying multiple subject positions including but not limited to Mother Monster and evil incarnate. “By continuously switching roles,” according to Ella Bedard, Gaga “complicates... dualities” (“The Trajectory of the Monster”) of good and evil, bringing into question the domination of one over the other. Clad in black leather and wielding a machine gun birthed from her vagina, evil personified is visually positioned as the polar opposite to the Eternal Mother who births the new race of little monsters. Be this as it may, the text of ‘The Manifesto Of Mother Monster’ and the fact that Gaga herself takes on both roles makes clear that evil is not simply an opposition to the goodness of the Eternal Mother but also a part of her and, it is hinted, necessarily used by her to “protect something so perfect” as her little monsters. The verbal confirmation of the intimate interconnectedness of the two “ultimate forces” of good and evil suggests something of Durkheim’s tribal religions, in which all material and psychic forces in the universe are, in the end, connected (166). By explicitly accepting this interconnectedness rather than attempting to cloak it in the Christian rhetoric of serpents and angels expelled from heaven, the manifesto that begins the “Born This Way” music video aligns itself more with primitive religions than with the institutionalized faiths of the plane of organization, which again hints at the Gaga-fan relationship as one of becoming.

A second way to understand “Born This Way’s” central opposition between good and evil, self-actualization and oppression as arbitrary relates to Deleuze and Guattari’s planes of organization and faith. The thinkers propose that “there are two planes, or two

ways of conceptualizing the plane” (265), a straightforward suggestion that in fact illuminates two possibilities for why “Born This Way’s” binary is false. First, considering the plane of organization to be separate from the plane of faith, even if “one continually passes from one to the other” (Deleuze and Guattari 269) then it must hold that the two planes are ultimately distinct. If this is the case, which Deleuze and Guattari suggest by noting the planes are “altogether different” (266), then the good self-actualizing of becoming which occurs on the plane of faith and the evil oppression, judgement and closed-mindedness of the plane of organization are also altogether different and therefore ranking them is futile, like ranking apples and oranges. Adopting this view of the planes thus disallows self-actualization and oppression from being compared, much less proposing one as dominant to the other.

If, on the other hand, we adopt Deleuze and Guattari’s proposition that the plane of organization and the plane of faith are not distinct but rather simply the same plane seen from different perspectives, we return once again to the interconnectedness of the ultimate forces of good and evil as represented in “Born This Way”. Deleuze and Guattari come to put forward organization and faith as “two abstract poles” (270) that are constantly “working away at” (270) one another, which returns us to the Eternal Mother “rotating in agony between two ultimate forces”. Considering this conception of the planes brings to mind the geographical and magnetic poles of the earth, both of which are fundamental for the stability and functionality of our planet; in a similar way, by this estimation of the planes of organization and faith, both are necessary and interconnected in such a way that to hierarchize one over the other is impossible. Finally, relating this back to the opposition between self-actualization and oppression in “Born This Way,” if

the former is of the plane of faith and the latter the plane of organization, under this understanding of the planes, both poles of the binary are crucial and thus any perceived dominance of one over the other is entirely false.

To return briefly to our analysis of “Paparazzi,” we will recall that a central tenet of celebrity holds that the icon must simultaneously be “ordinary and extraordinary” (Ellis 91), and in the music video for “Born This Way,” Gaga once again fulfils this requirement. Simultaneously “leader of the pack” (Deleuze and Guattari 243) and writhing pack member covered in primordial goo (5:36), it would seem that in “Born This Way” Lady Gaga is visually offering viewers not only her personal – and thus ordinary – struggle with the evils of oppression and self-judgement but also her extraordinary unequivocal victory over that evil. Like in “Paparazzi,” however, the visual does not always offer the whole story.

Invoking Lacanian theory, Ella Bedard points out that the “bifurcated ‘I,’” or multiple subject positions adopted by Gaga in “Born This Way” amount to a “false dichotomy...between the idealized...and the self” (“The Trajectory of the Monster”), transcendence and reality. The result of the bifurcated I in the video and indeed Gaga’s larger project of encouraging fans’ self-actualization is twofold: First, it reinforces that the battle of good over evil is far from won, again making clear that the proposed dominance and victory of self-actualization over oppression is falsely made and arbitrary. Secondly, it suggests that the drive for the ideal-self, or the achievement of a complete becoming-Gaga for both Lady Gaga and her fans, is ultimately impossible. Deleuze and Guattari assert this to be the case, noting that becoming is an infinite but always incomplete process (259). We shall return to this second realization in the final chapter of

our study.

### III

Cheryl Helm asserts that achieving the self-actualization of becoming-Gaga “requires no institutional acquiescence,” and while the process of becoming is marked by a break with central institutions of the plane of organization (Deleuze and Guattari 247), there are a plethora of ways that Lady Gaga implicitly demands her little monsters remain attached to the selfsame institutions that seek to neuter becomings. In “Born This Way,” although Gaga is explicitly encouraging fans to use her as a gateway to the transcendence associated with self-actualization, she is simultaneously blocking the possibility for true self-actualization by positioning herself as the one and only gateway through which to achieve it. Considering in detail both the process of becoming as it relates to Lady Gaga and her overall project will serve to illuminate the hidden way that Gaga denies her little monsters the right to be “born superstars,” and how the opposition between good and evil, self-actualization and oppression cannot continue.

Perhaps it should not come as a surprise that Lady Gaga’s confessed project of bringing self-actualization to her fans cannot be considered a true becoming. After all, she is the anomalous of her pack of monsters, and Deleuze and Guattari assert that the anomalous exists “between villages,” belonging “first of all to a group united to the group over which he or she exercises influence” (246). Lady Gaga’s primary allegiance is not to her little monsters but to another group, one that exists firmly on the plane of organization and thus actively seeks to reduce becomings. That group is the music industry and all the institutionalization and hierarchy associated with it. Though one

might conceivably argue that this allegiance is not hidden but rather a given in the relentlessly consumerist culture we live in, many have argued the complex interplay between consumerism and fandom and the degree to which all parties are enmeshed in the industry is intentionally obscured by both fans and producers (Abercrombie and Longhurst; Buxton; Fiske; Hills Fan Cultures; Jenkins "Strangers No More"; Negus "Sinead O'Connor"). In the final portion of this analysis, we shall move to reflect upon how this masked allegiance, and thus the denial of the relationship between Gaga and her fans as one of becoming, is evidenced in "Born This Way".

Considering Lady Gaga's primary loyalty to the music industry and thus the plane of organization in relation to "Born This Way" explains a number of oddities found in the music video. In the 'Manifesto of Mother Monster' that begins the video, Lady Gaga tells that the birth of the new race of self-actualized little monsters takes place on "G.O.A.T., a government owned alien territory in space". Deleuze and Guattari explicitly note that state apparatuses belong not to the transcendent plane of faith but rather the plane of organization (242), which, when attempting to read the video as confirmation of the fan-icon relationship as one of becoming, seems discordant. If the Eternal Mother of "Born This Way" is birthing a race that is free from prejudice and judgement, that birth would almost certainly need to take place on the plane of faith, where subjectivity and hierarchies do not exist. Gaga's allegiance to the music industry and the plane of organization goes a long way to explain the Eternal Mother's presence on a government owned territory, not to mention offering a clarification of why the maternal is repeatedly insisted upon in the relationship between she and her fans, both in "Born This Way," and Lady Gaga's overall project.



In the initial stages of their discussion of becoming, Deleuze and Guattari assert that “the origin of packs is entirely different from that of families” (242), and that packs are not “filiative regimes,” but rather groups that proliferate through “contagion” (246) or fascination. While we have previously discussed Lady Gaga as the fascinating pack leader for her little monsters, “Born This Way” finds Gaga consciously and explicitly adopting the roles of Mother Monster and the Eternal Mother. Though in interviews she is careful to disavow her role in the production of these positions, instead placing responsibility for the moniker Mother Monster with her fans (MSNEntertainment), she simultaneously embraces the maternal role, recently telling *Rolling Stone* that she and her fans share an “umbilical cord that I don’t want to cut, ever...They are...so much of my person” (Hiatt 44). The ‘Manifesto of Mother Monster’ cements Gaga’s acceptance of her positioning as a maternal figure for her fans. This effectively establishes the relationship between she and the little monsters on “the side of the family,” which is “the death of becoming” (Deleuze and Guattari 248). Moreover, it is Gaga herself who wrote the text for both the ‘Manifesto of Mother Monster’ and the previously mentioned “Manifesto of Little Monsters,” and thus it is she who has crafted both subject positions in the relationship with her fans. As becomings are associated with the eradication and not creation of subjectivities (Deleuze and Guattari 266), the relation she is encouraging with her fans cannot be one of becoming in the authentic sense.

Lyrically, “Born This Way” hints at the self-actualization we have associated with becoming as passed from generation to generation maternally rather than by contagion, which again aligns the Lady Gaga-fan relationship as one borne of familial institutions of the plane of organization. Gaga sings, “My mama told me when I was young we are all

born superstars,” and although Deleuze and Guattari give special attention to the process of becoming-woman (277-8), this process is entirely unrelated to traditional mother daughter activities. The narrative of “Born This Way’s” first verse finds Gaga’s mother delivering words of wisdom while rolling her daughter’s hair and applying lipstick with the young Gaga at the maternal boudoir, suggesting the route to self-actualization as imitation of that with which one engaged in becoming. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Deleuze and Guattari assert imitative practices as being ultimately unrelated to the process of becoming (275), still further distancing “Born This Way’s” explicit project of making little monsters self-actualized through Gaga’s self-actualization from the plane of faith, where true, non-imitative becomings occur.

One might be tempted to argue that the bond between Lady Gaga and her fans is not familial for the simple reason that both parties claim themselves as monstrous, an existence called interstitial by Noël Carroll and thus outside the bounds of family-type relations. Many of the visuals associated with the release of Born This Way play up the monstrosity of Gaga, including the prosthetic facial ‘bones’ she was often adorned with during promotional appearances. Discussing her new appearance, Lady Gaga maintained that these bones were always a part of her but were only now revealed (Werde) because she had learned to “consciously become,” or chose “to become conscious of the seemingly limitless potential” (Durbin and Vicks) within her, evoking her oft-implied notion that her fans had somehow inspired a becoming for her (Schoonmaker). Both monstrosity and becoming are evident in the cover art for Born This Way, which features Lady Gaga in a process best described as becoming-motorcycle. Of this image Gaga says “I’m now not just a vehicle for my own voice, but I’m the vehicle for [my fans’] voice as

well” (MSNEntertainment), pointing to her self-construction as a gateway to self-actualization for her little monsters. Keith Negus has noted how an album cover and sleeve function to both specifically define the artist and to explain how the music should be understood (“Sinead O’Connor” 186), and the images associated with “Born This Way,” certainly suggest a transformation through becoming. Taken together, these images offer a strong argument for the relation between Gaga and her fans as one of becoming rather than a familial nature, however the ‘Manifesto of Mother Monster’ again suggests otherwise.

The ‘Manifesto of Mother Monster’ does attempt to distance its new race from traditional propagation by citing its birth as “mitosis,” a non-sexual reproductive process similar to cloning (“Mitosis”). Though this would seem to negate the argument for becoming-Gaga as a filiative process, it presents another problem, namely that by cloning herself to create her little monsters, Gaga is effectively disallowing the self-actualization of the new race; rather than becoming the superstars they were born to be, under the birth that is foretold in the ‘Manifesto of Mother Monster,’ the little monsters literally *become* Gaga. This notion is reinforced by the fact that all the faces birthed from the Eternal Mother are only slightly altered versions of Lady Gaga’s own visage (4:40). Born in her image, they have the “same DNA” as Mother Monster and are thus only as free as Gaga dictates to “transform themselves,” or “cross over into” (Deleuze and Guattari 249) another pack. Remembering that one of the anomalous’ functions is to act as a borderline (Deleuze and Guattari 245) to the pack, Lady Gaga has the power to protect and patrol this borderline, marking the “enveloping line or farthest dimension” (Deleuze and Guattari 245) to which her pack members can stray. In other words, though Lady Gaga

tells her fans, “Don’t idolize me, idolize yourself” (Sun), having fascinated and enchanted fans to join her pack of little monsters, by naming mitosis as the route to the self-actualization associated with becoming-Gaga, the Icon effectively traps fans within the boundaries of that pack.

Even if we are prepared to accept that the relationship associated with the non-traditional “birth of magnificent and magical proportions” is familial in name only, there is considerable evidence that the relationship functions hierarchically, with Lady Gaga firmly ensconced at the top of that hierarchy. Although Deleuze and Guattari assert the figure of the anomalous does sometimes function as the leader of the pack (243), they are adamant that the assemblages associated with becoming are non-hierarchical (242) in nature. For the thinkers, we will recall, hierarchies belong to the institutions of the plane of organization and are thus antithetical to the becomings of the plane of faith. While the lyrics of “Born This Way” promote self-acceptance and thus transcendence of the oppressive institutions of the plane of organization, there is much in the song and video beyond Lady Gaga’s frequently adopted maternal position that suggests she has no desire for her little monsters to achieve an authentic and personal transcendence.

The conflict between “Born This Way’s” surface message of self-acceptance regardless of skin colour, sexual orientation or material wealth – a message firmly rooted in the loss of individual difference that occurs on the plane of faith – and the video’s implication that the transcendence of self-judgement and fear can only be done by literally becoming-Gaga is perhaps best exposed by again considering the phrase “born this way”. Earlier in this chapter, we suggested that shifting emphasis in the phrase from the first to the second word illuminates the fact that there is a multiplicity of ways to be

born and re-born. Keeping the emphasis on “this,” but considering the phrase alongside the contention that “Born This Way” functions as a call by Gaga for fans to use her as a gateway drug to transcendence now suggests the word “this” as evidence that there is but one way for little monsters to be born: in Gaga’s image.

If we consider the lyrics that immediately precede each declamation of “I was born this way,” the notion of a singular pathway to transcendence is reinforced, again highlighting how Lady Gaga’s project in relation to her fans is not to encourage a true becoming but rather something of a drug addiction, with her own persona acting as the drug. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize that on the plane of faith, “each individual is an infinite multiplicity” (254) in themselves, and that “no one can say where the line of flight” (250) that is “rushing towards becoming-imperceptible” (279) will pass. To put it more concretely and in terms relevant to our study, we each of us contain an infinite number of potentials and it is impossible to know or consciously direct ourselves onto any one particular path toward transcendence. Thus, when Lady Gaga sings, “I’m on the right track” as a part of the affirmation for her little monsters, she is doubly going against the true process of becoming by suggesting not only that there exists only one pathway by which to reach the plane of faith but also that her way is that one correct pathway.

There is evidence supporting the idea that some fans have consciously internalized Gaga-as-gateway, believing themselves to have come to their true selves by and through Gaga and Gaga only. To paraphrase Durkheim, when a group falls in love with an individual, and if it thinks it has found in that individual the principle aspirations that move it, that individual will be deified (243). Lady Gagaita, another entrant in the previously mentioned *Metro News* contest that asked fans to explain what made them

'born this way,' explicitly indicates his desire to become Gaga, saying "I was born to...replicate her...mission and vision...to transform...to perfection." This does not suggest the entrant wants to become Gaga the pop musician or celebrity, but rather an imitation of the Gaga who is brave, confident and unashamed of her monstrous identity. On one level, this could be read as substantiation for the argument that Lady Gaga is the little monsters' anomalous, but in fact it actually cements a much more troubling realization: fans are, by putting faith in Lady Gaga as a self-actualized being, buying Gaga's offer to use her as the one and only agent of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 283). To link more concretely back to "Born This Way" itself and the "infinite birth" it tells of, Lady Gagaita's remark indicates that some fans accept and indeed inspire to be products of Lady Gaga's mitosis. This crucial realization will be returned to in the final pages of our research.

Deleuze and Guattari assert that drug addiction – the continual use of the same gateway to the plane of faith – does not result in a becoming but rather "a line of death," that causes them to "continually fall back into what they wanted to escape" (285). Therefore, fans like Lady Gagaita and Brad Perrett who, it would seem, fail to find their own route to self-actualization through becoming-Gaga and instead continue to use her to "feel an illusory sense" (Jenson 19) of transcendence are little more than drug addicts, dependent on Gaga and thus subject to the institutional hierarchy associated with her alliance to the plane of organization and the music industry. That fans actually pay for this dubious privilege is a matter of great interest and import, and one that we shall examine in detail in the final two chapters of our analysis.

Ultimately, the opposition between good and evil set up by "Born This Way," and

Lady Gaga's rhetoric associating the self-actualizing practice of becoming-Gaga with the perceived dominance of good over evil, false though they may be, do point us towards the final object of reflection in our study. In our first chapter, we examined the fame-hungry starlet of "Paparazzi," finding a symbiotic relationship hiding just below the surface of what appeared to be a one way flow of attention and affection between fan and icon; in "Born This Way," we have discovered the explicitly symbiotic relationship between the Eternal Mother and her little monsters to be false, hiding a hierarchy with Mother Monster firmly placed at the top. What then, is the true nature of the relationship between fan and icon as evidenced by Lady Gaga and her little monsters? Does it function as an organized religion, promising but ultimately denying transcendence, or is there a way to understand the relationship between Lady Gaga and her fans as one of becoming, transcendent in spite of institutional pressure to conform to familial and domestic expectations? Or, to use the terminology of Deleuze and Guattari, does Gaga exist "at the borderline...between" (246) her little monsters and the music industry? It is this final thought that shall preoccupy the final chapter and ultimately come to suggest the true potential of Lady Gaga and her band of little monsters.

### Judas

With “Judas,” the second single and music video from Born This Way, Lady Gaga retreats from the eclectic imagery of the title single, once again making use of explicitly Christian imagery and themes. Although she has publicly contended that “Judas” is “a metaphor for forgiveness and betrayal and darkness” (Sun) and not meant to be a biblical lesson, it is impossible to hear the song or watch the music video without immediately being struck by its overt allusions to the New Testament story of Jesus’ betrayal. Playing the role of Mary Magdalene caught between Jesus and Judas, Lady Gaga has again presented fans with a representation of their Mother Monster caught between “two ultimate forces,” and interrogating this relation and its religious ties serves to illuminate much about the position of the icon in the spiritual dimension of popular music fandom.

### I

Of the three objects of reflection considered in this analysis, the opposition in “Judas” between the titular character and Jesus is undoubtedly the most explicit and familiar to audiences. The reading of this opposition that will inform our analysis takes the common understandings of Jesus and Judas and strips them down to their core characteristics in order to unpack what the opposition might represent to the Lady Gaga-fan relationship as it has been theorized thus far. Before beginning, it is important to note that although the thinkers upon whose theories this work is based contend that Judeo-Christian religions are of the plane of organization (Deleuze and Guattari 242, 248, 267) and are thus predicated on a separation between man and god (Nancy 114), spiritual force



and the faithful (Durkheim 236), the *promise* of Christianity is one of transcendence and coming to know god. This being the case, our reading of “Judas” will hold to this promise, false though it may be, for the promise is one that Lady Gaga herself makes to her little monsters. It is the promise of transcendence that occupies one pole in the opposition offered in “Judas”.

In Christian theology, Jesus Christ is the son of God but borne of man. Though there exist innumerable definitions for who and what Jesus is and what the figure of Jesus represents, the core of his existence to the faithful is as a manifestation of God and God’s love for mankind (*New American Standard Bible*, Matthew 1.20, 3.17; John 3.16). Jesus’ teachings hold that those who do good service to another will have eternal life (Matt. 25.46). In other words, being of service to all others in life gains one entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven after death, where one becomes unified with God. For our reading of “Judas,” then, Jesus represents the promise of transcendence associated with the “tormenting and glorious” (Nancy 137) experience of being in the presence of god on the plane of faith (Deleuze and Guattari 267). To relate this more explicitly to our analysis, Jesus thus represents the spiritual part of Lady Gaga’s overall project that encourages her little monsters to engage in the purportedly transcendent process of becoming-Gaga. Given that the music video explicitly makes use of the biblical account of Jesus’ life and betrayal, this reading is clearly evidenced in the text.

In the popular vernacular, the name Judas has come to be practically synonymous with betrayal, and although the notion that Gaga has somehow betrayed or tricked her little monsters was hinted at in the preceding chapter, there is a second common attribute given to Judas that is more relevant to our analysis. Biblically, according to the Gospel

of Matthew, Judas betrays Jesus for thirty pieces of silver, asking the chief priests, "What are you willing to give to me to betray him to you?" (Matt. 26.14), which aligns the betrayer with material concerns. The Gospel of John indicates that it was Judas who was responsible for carrying the disciples' money, and that it was taken from him "because he was a thief" (John 12.6). Further aligning Judas with monetary concerns, the Gospel of John tells that Judas questioned the disciples' use of their resources, asking, "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred shillings?" (John 12.5). In our analysis of "Judas," we shall understand the figure of the title character as a representation of commerce, and more specifically, align him with Lady Gaga's existence as a commodity and alliance with the music industry on the plane of organization.

There is much substantiation in the music video for the association between Judas and commerce. Most explicit is the implied relationship between he and Gaga as Mary Magdalene in the narrative. The pair's mutual attraction is palpable, however there are two moments when it is clear that Judas sees Gaga as an object to be possessed and not a lover or partner. First, with a glance, as Gaga and Jesus make their way through the crowd, Judas leers at Gaga with ravenous eyes as though she were a delicacy to be eaten, or, as Andrea Quinlan has suggested, "like a meat dress," rather than as a human subject (2:38). The second instance occurs while Gaga is prostrate at the feet of both Jesus and Judas; Judas empties a can of beer onto her back (4:49) as though to baptize her with the holy water of mass culture. Both moments serve not only to confirm Judas as the roustabout the song's lyrics suggest, but also to make explicit that Judas – as a representative of commerce and consumer culture – understands Gaga to be a thing to dominate. Judas' desire to dominate Gaga mirrors the control contemporarily wielded by

commerce and thus the intense pressure of the music industry and the plane of organization on the spiritual dimension of the relationship between Lady Gaga and her little monsters.

The Gospel of Matthew suggests commerce and material wealth as antithetical to the divine, which begins to further illuminate how the analysis that follows will read Lady Gaga's struggle to serve the two forces pressing upon her in "Judas". The most explicit example of the opposition between the spiritual and commerce is from the Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt. 6.24), suggesting not only the opposition but that a choice must be made between the two. Also during the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his followers, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6.21), intimating that the choice one makes between material and spiritual wealth will also decide where one's ultimate allegiance lies; Jesus' casting out of money-changers from the temple (Matt. 21.12) further emphasizes the separation of commerce and spirituality and that one must choose between them. Considering monetary tributes, the Gospel of Matthew claims Jesus maintained that one should "Render...unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22.21), suggesting not only that monetary and spiritual wealth are distinct, but that they in fact operate in two different spheres. Here, then, is the heart of the binary opposition for our reading of "Judas": monetary and spiritual wealth, commerce and spirituality, drug addiction (Deleuze and Guattari 285) and true transcendence.

Defining the central opposition in "Judas" as between the material and the spiritual brings immediately to mind our previous analyses and the surface oppositions

found in "Paparazzi" and "Born This Way". In "Paparazzi," Lady Gaga seemed to be making explicit the distinction between fan and celebrity, hailing the celebrity figure as dominant and creating a firmly drawn boundary separating the two (Fiske 34-5). This opposition, arbitrary though it was shown to be, suggested the plane of organization and the material world of commerce. The central opposition in "Born This Way" was read as between self-actualization and oppression, with self-actualization hailed as dominant. Again, though this surface binary was destroyed in our deeper analysis of the song, it nonetheless suggested the plane of faith and the spiritual world of transcendence and an eradication of the boundary between icon and fan, mankind and god. Taken together, the dominant pole of the primary oppositions in "Paparazzi" and "Born This Way" thus create the central opposition between the spiritual and material in "Judas," and make explicit Lady Gaga's attempt at serving both.

We will remember that both "Born This Way" and "Paparazzi" featured Lady Gaga herself as personifying good and evil, fan and icon; with "Judas," though she acts upon (and is acted upon by) Jesus and Judas, by not adopting these roles in the lyrical or visual components of the song, Gaga is literally and figuratively thrust between the two, making the opposition between them all the more apparent. Also, in remaining external to the constructed binary in the song and the wider biblical story, Lady Gaga frees herself from responsibility for that binary, simultaneously disavowing her role in its construction and maintenance and implicitly communicating to fans that she is as affected by the pressures of the binary as are the little monsters themselves.

The issue of isolating the pole of the opposition that is dominant in this third case is a more difficult one than those that came before for the simple fact that both lyrically

and visually, the narrative of “Judas” is focused on the pull Gaga as Mary Magdalene feels towards both poles. This pull is perhaps best evidenced by the lyric, “Jesus is my virtue but Judas is the demon I cling to,” which illuminates how Lady Gaga is figuratively stuck between a rock and a hard place. Amanda Montai makes explicit the confusion this positioning results in, asking, “if Judas and Jesus are to be interpreted as...duelling forces, whose side is Gaga on?” Confusion notwithstanding, the lyric also indicates that though Gaga as Mary Magdalene desires Judas, we are meant to read the figure of Jesus as virtuous and thus the dominant pole in the opposition set forth by the song. In the pages that follow, we shall seek to unpack other ways this dominance of Jesus over Judas and thus the spiritual over the material is evidenced.

Like the purported domination of good over evil we explored in the preceding chapter, the figure of Jesus is culturally assumed to be above that of Judas for the simple reason that he is Jesus, son of God and the central figure in Christianity. Lady Gaga’s video for “Judas” constructs Jesus as somehow not of this world, alien to the sex and violence of the Electric Chapel bar and the carousing of his disciples amongst the throngs. Although Gaga imagines Jesus as the leader of a motorcycle gang, his leadership is not predicated on the displays of power typically associated with bikers but rather a power so ultimately confident that it need not be made manifest. Rather than evidencing his “authority over” (Mark 10.42) his followers through violence, Gaga’s Jesus moves through the crowd seemingly unaware of the fracas that surrounds him, with a singularity of purpose that marks him as in control and other to the brute force of Judas and the other disciples. Considering the common cultural assumption of violence as evil further elevates Gaga’s Jesus and his goodness over Judas’ drives for material and

physical power.

In terms of the general narrative structure of the video for “Judas,” the climax and denouement of the clip clearly indicate that Lady Gaga as Mary Magdalene affirms her love for and dedication to Jesus regardless of the fact that she is ultimately complicit in his betrayal by Judas. In the moments before Judas kisses Jesus, an act that in the Gospels is the moment of betrayal, Gaga is seen wielding a gun, acting as Jesus’ protector (3:19); when Judas approaches Jesus, Gaga pushes herself between the two men and raises the gun to Judas’ torso in an effort that indicates she is prepared to sacrifice her “demon” for her “virtue”. Though she does not ultimately block Judas’ betrayal, Gaga throws herself to Jesus’ feet in surrender (4:38), for she recognizes him as representative of her “right track”. Washed clean of her sins by a veritable deluge of rushing water, Lady Gaga affirms the power of Jesus and the spiritual, in the process hailing them as dominant to the demonic possession of her Judas, commerce and consumer culture.

## II

The biblical narrative of Jesus’ life is predicated on the fact that he was born to die. The fifth book in the New Testament, Acts of the Apostles, holds that Jesus was betrayed and crucified “by the determined council and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2.23), suggesting his betrayal by Judas as a necessary step towards fulfilment of the holistic plan for his existence. If this is the case, then we cannot affirm Jesus and Judas as oppositional figures, but must instead see them as parts of the same whole, much like the purported opposition between good and evil in “Born This Way”.

As a means of highlighting how the dominance of the Jesus figure in “Judas” is

perhaps less sure than we might imagine, let us return briefly to the moment in the music video where Gaga as Mary appears to be preparing to sacrifice the titular character so as to avoid Jesus' ultimate betrayal. Invoking the assertion in the Gospel of Matthew that Jesus knew not only that he was to be betrayed (Matt. 26.21) but that Judas was to be his betrayer (Matt. 26.25), Gaga as Mary looks to Jesus for confirmation that she should strike Judas down, but Jesus simply shakes his head no (3:27). Although this could simply be read as a refusal on the part of Jesus to assert his dominance over Judas, a more productive reading of this incident is to suggest, as the Gospel of Matthew does, that Jesus himself accepted that the betrayal would occur. Like "Born This Way's" conception of good and evil as poles on the same continuum rather than as opposites existent on different planes, Jesus' acceptance that his betrayal is somehow necessary and foretold confirms that Jesus and Judas are not oppositional but symbiotic figures, each crucial for the fulfilment of the others' fate.

Meghan Vicks, in her thoughtful analysis of "Judas," suggests something of the symbiotic relationship between proposed oppositions in her discussion of the music video's choreography. Invoking the Hegelian dialectical process of thesis, anti-thesis, synthesis, Vicks asserts that "Judas'" choreography "is very even-sided: movement on the right (thesis) is followed by the reflected movement on the left (anti-thesis), finally punctuated by a third movement that synthesizes the two." Significant is Vicks' reading of Lady Gaga herself as the "body of reconciliation," for it affirms Gaga as anomalous. First, Vicks' suggestion implicitly confirms our argument that Gaga "haunts the fringes," simultaneously beholden to and between two groups (Deleuze and Guattari 246). Secondly, it implies that Lady Gaga herself is engaged in the act of collecting and

synthesizing a disparate group of socially ostracized outcasts into a pack of little monsters. Ultimately, the idea of Lady Gaga as a site of reconciliation in “Judas” helps construct the bridge that links the video to the wider project between she and her fans.

The relationship between the spiritual and the material is often hinted at in literature from the field of fan studies in discussing the connection fans feel for the cultural texts they adore. Historically, according to Joli Jenson, fandom was associated with the notion of modernity as somehow “spiritually threatened” (14), and attendance at fan gatherings such as concerts were considered an attempt by the disenfranchised “to feel an illusory sense of community” (19) not dissimilar to the false promise of transcendence offered by organized religions. More explicitly relevant to this study, Matthew Hills notes the common assumption that fans and consumers are somehow distinct from one another (Fan Cultures 27). Theories like this explicitly deny the symbiotic relationship between the material and the spiritual, fan-consumer practices and transcendence.

More recently, the theory that “bricolage” is required for identity building (DeNora 46) and self-actualization alongside the work of earlier sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Thomas Luckmann has birthed readings of the relationship between fans and cultural texts that affirms and even encourages the mixing between sacred and profane, spiritual and material. Hills takes issue with the common segregation of fan and consumer identities, explicitly asserting that fans are inherently consumers (Fan Cultures 29) and thus subject to market forces. Though he does not use the terminology of this study, his central point is that the affection fans feel for a particular cultural text cannot and should not be separated from the commercial requirements of this affection. While



some consider this affection and its spiritual dimension little more than shrewd marketing aimed at those “bent on escaping...through the transformative ideology of consumerism” (Stromberg qtd. in Doss 73), the majority of thinkers on the subject stress the symbiotic relationship between producer and consumer. John Fiske wrote in 1992 “the relationship of popular culture to the culture industries is therefore complex and fascinating, sometimes conflictive, sometimes complicitous” (48), highlighting the malleability of the relationship. The important point to take from the field of fan studies for our purposes is that for fans, the spiritual and material dimensions of their devotion freely intermingle, and though this mingling may be unacknowledged, it nonetheless affirms that the opposition between the two in “Judas” as ultimately false and unfounded.

The most obvious narrative example of how the opposition proposed by “Judas” is arbitrary is found by again considering Lady Gaga’s position in relation to Jesus and Judas, the spiritual and the material. Previously we have contended that by constructing herself as “the pendulum of choice” stuck between two “ultimate forces,” Gaga denies her role in the maintenance of the opposition. Reflecting upon the opposition as symbiotic, we come to see that it is not a denial of her hand in maintaining the dichotomy that Gaga is making explicit with “Judas”. Again considering Meghan Vicks’ assertion of Gaga as the “body of reconciliation” between thesis and anti-thesis, her position – both in the video and her wider project – is not one of victimization by forces outside her control but an intentional mediation of an opposition that existed long before she and her fans created her as Lady Gaga the Icon.

The choice is not between one and the other, spirituality or material culture. Rather, both must exist. The moment in the music video that most clearly illustrates the

need for and Gaga's allegiance to both poles of the opposition is when she shares a bathtub with Jesus and Judas. Washing the men's feet, Gaga is honouring them both, and thus "the two biggest competing parts of [her project]: the one that wants to create art that makes a better world, and the one that simply wants to be famous and adored" (Kinzel); making explicit that without her fame and the hierarchy of the music industry that goes with it, her more meaningful project of encouraging the emancipation of her little monsters is impossible. In other words, the institutionalization and hierarchy associated with material culture, the music industry and the plane of organization is necessary if Lady Gaga and her little monsters are to engage in the process of becoming, the impossible aim of which is ultimately to undo those very institutions that are necessary for its occurrence.

To adopt the terminology of the primary theorists behind this analysis, in order for Lady Gaga to function as anomalous, her fans must view her as somehow different to them, an "exceptional individual" (Deleuze and Guattari 243) who is at once "ordinary and extraordinary" (Ellis 91), "present but absent" (King 49) and offering herself in her concealed presence (Nancy 111). Given that celebrity is predicated on the assumption of difference from mere mortals, it can only exist on the plane of organization, where individual subjectivities separate one from another. Thus, in order for Lady Gaga to exist as an Icon and encourage little monsters to enter into a becoming-Gaga, she must mediate the realms of sacred and profane, promising herself as gateway between the plane of organization and the plane of faith regardless of the falseness of that promise. In the final section of this analysis, we will explore this mediation before finally considering what Lady Gaga's position as mediator illuminates about her relationship with fans.

### III

The revelation that Lady Gaga must necessarily mediate the realms of sacred and profane is not to suggest that she does not explicitly argue for the eradication of the “demon” that is the commerce and capitalism on the plane of organization; quite the contrary, in fact. In discussing “Judas,” Gaga’s then-creative director Laurieann Gibson stresses that the concept is a confirmation that “out of your oppression...your Judas, you can come into the marvellous light” (Sun). A message sent to Gaga’s more than eleven million fans on Twitter in the hours leading up to the release of “Judas” as a single seemed to subtly nod to this notion, reading, “The real Judas: He’s everywhere, now. Don’t stop until he’s yours” (LadyGaga 15 April); while the explicit meaning behind this message is pedantic, simply an encouragement to purchase the new single, her use of the phrase “until he’s yours” (Lady Gaga 15 April) suggests something of an ownership or domestication of the Judas figure. In other words, by relentless effort one can dominate or break down and train the demon to work for rather than oppress them. Lady Gaga’s mediation of the oppositional forces of spirituality and commerce is an attempt to domesticate the traditional, hierarchical functioning patterns of fandom as a means of recreating it in a fashion that suits the self-actualization of her millions of little monsters.

Biblically, it is Mary Magdalene who discovers Jesus’ resurrection and tells the other disciples of it (John 20.14-20.18), acting the role of mediator between the ascended deity and those who remained on earth; in much the same way, Gaga as Mary Magdalene can be read as mediating the relationship between Jesus and his biker gang cum disciples in “Judas”. In the video’s opening moments, it is she who is seated behind Jesus on his motorcycle and who directs the disciples (0:32), and in her role as Jesus’ protector in the

Electric Chapel, she seems also to be his gatekeeper, granting and denying access to him for the faithful. As previously mentioned, Gaga's imagining of Jesus is very much not of this world, and while he is undoubtedly the figure with the most power in the video, there is a moment (2:42) when, offering support to a member of the throng, it is as though Gaga as Mary is the one who mobilizes that power in the Electric chapel, affirming her as mediator between spiritual and terrestrial. This is further evidenced by Gaga's costume at the climax of the video, the moment of Jesus' betrayal. Dressed as a stylized version of the Pope or other highly ranked member of the clergy with an enormous pectoral cross around her neck, an Episcopal ring, a scarlet fanon draped over her shoulder and a black headpiece reminiscent of the mitre, Gaga embodies the power of God on earth, cementing her as mediator not just between Judas and Jesus, but also man and the divine.

It is worth briefly considering an example of Lady Gaga's mediation of the two forces, and how the influence the plane of organization gives her over her little monsters parallels that wielded by state and religious institutions. In their discussion of how institutions of the plane of organization constantly work away at becomings, Deleuze and Guattari note, "states have always appropriated the war machine in favour of national armies that strictly limit the becomings of the warrior" (248). In other words, on the plane of organization there is a history of channelling the religious impulse or desire of individuals to enter into a becoming away from the transcendence of the plane of faith and instead into larger projects that ultimately benefit those in power. Lady Gaga's rallying of her little monster "army" (Katz) for causes including the legalization of gay marriage and the eradication of the U.S. Army's controversial 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' policy is arguably an example of Gaga's appropriation of the power of her fans, but it

also benefits a large swath of that fan base. By putting her influence to a use that ultimately seeks to wound the plane of organization and its forms and hierarchies, Gaga is able to wield the tools of that plane to encourage the self-actualization of her fans on the plane of faith.

One might ask whether Lady Gaga's mediation of the spiritual and material, planes of faith and organization, is not simply further evidence in support of her previously proposed function as a gateway drug for her fans, for even by rallying fans to a cause beneficial for them, Gaga is still the channel by which the benefit is initiated. In both cases, Gaga is essentially creating herself as a "line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari 250) from one plane to the other. The query is a fair one, especially considering Matthew Hills' contention that the fan practice of immersing themselves in cultural texts is a means of trying to capture "the original cathartic moment" (Fan Cultures 42) associated with that text. Recalling our discussion in the previous chapter that the use and re-use of cultural texts as a means of achieving catharsis brings about not a becoming but rather a "line of death" (Deleuze and Guattari 258) brings into focus the potentially problematic positioning of Lady Gaga as mediator between the material and the spiritual.

Emile Durkheim's discussion of the totem in primitive religions offers a starting point for exploring the dangers associated with Gaga's position as mediator. Durkheim's research found that totemic beings are, in the vast majority of instances, a species rather than a specific creature – not *a* kangaroo, but *the* kangaroo (125); to put this in terms more analogous to our study, the icon in general and not a specific Icon herself. "When a sacred thing is subdivided" (Durkheim 261), as is the case where all members of the worshipped species share totemic power, there exists a plethora of ways to interact with

and celebrate the “special world” (Durkheim 250) promised by the totem. In other words, tribe members have many channels by which to achieve transcendence. Compare this with Gaga’s existence for her little monsters as the one and only figure that mediates the spheres of the spiritual and the material, allowing for passage from the plane of organization to the plane of faith, and we begin to understand the enormous pressure this puts on Lady Gaga and her relationship with fans more generally.

Considering this pressure alongside our previous assertion that the relationship between icon and fan, totem and tribe member, Lady Gaga and the little monsters is a symbiotic one gives more credence to evidence in the previous chapter that the becoming encouraged by Gaga is not an authentic one. Deleuze and Guattari assert that the anomalous “is neither an individual nor a genus” (258), not a mediating subject but “the borderline” between the two groups to which she is beholden. In the most general sense, this is for the very simple reason that becomings eschew individual subjectivities, but I would contend that it is also due to the fact that were the anomalous a single entity, the temptation would be too great to merely use the figure as a channel to temporary transcendence to the plane of faith rather than as the fascinating spark from which the fire of personal, individual transcendence is born.

No one will deny that Lady Gaga, offering not only transcendence but also irresistible pop hooks as bait, exists first and foremost as a product in the market. In his 1986 book Heavenly Bodies, Richard Dyer maintains that performers, as much as the industrial powers that be, are complicit in fashioning themselves as commodities (qtd. in Negus “Sinead O’Connor” 178), and Lady Gaga is no exception. Given this, it is no surprise that Gaga chooses to take on the role of Mary Magdalene in “Judas,” for the

figure “continues to be synonymous with ‘prostitute’ in popular culture” (Kinzel). Gaga herself, in the lyrics of the song, self-identifies as a “fame hooker, prostitute, wench” who is “beyond repentance” in the biblical sense, which suggests something of the fact that her position as a commodity in the commercial sphere negates the possibility of her bringing any lasting transcendence to her fans. Like Mary Magdalene, Gaga’s power to lead the faithful towards transcendence – her existence as a “more crucial apostle” (Kinzel) – is undercut by the fact that she can “not be entirely trusted to take the high road” (Kinzel) because of her association with fame and material wealth.

If the relationship between Lady Gaga and her fans is one that mimics the process of becoming as described by Deleuze and Guattari but ultimately behaves more like drug addiction, then what are we left with? Does her attempt to mediate and police the material plane of organization to suit the needs of her little monsters while simultaneously maintaining her fame on that plane negate the possibilities proposed by the false promise of transcendence offered? Or is Lady Gaga simply “speak[ing] in future tense” of an imagined day when some icon of popular culture will achieve what the gods of organized religion never could, namely true community within and under the inescapable umbrella of capitalism? A brief consideration of the consequences should Lady Gaga be “trusted to take the high road” (Kinzel) and devote herself completely to the virtuous in her project will lead us to the concluding thoughts of this chapter.

Speaking theoretically and in accordance with Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of the divine, we can contend that if Lady Gaga (or any other icon, for that matter) were to somehow remove herself from the commodity market and reveal herself in her particularity (Nancy 149), her fans would come into true community with her and thus

each other. If that were to occur, however, she would not only cease to be an Icon but also, it is fair to suggest, no longer fulfil the role of fascinating anomalous for her little monsters. Though they would be each exposed to the other (Nancy 143), there would no longer be the need for a figure with whom to make the alliance by which to initiate the process of becoming, for the end goal of their becoming – “enter[ing] into the haecceity of” (Deleuze and Guattari 280) Gaga – would be achieved. The fan-icon estrangement collapsed, little monsters would truly be self-actualized, confident in their individual monstrosities and thus with no need for Gaga as anomalous. Because of the inescapability of the plane of organization and thus commerce and capitalism, Lady Gaga must remain somewhat “concealed” (Nancy 111) behind her status as a product, negating the possibility for this theorized revelation to occur. Thus, in order to continue to make a difference – to “protect something so perfect” as the fragile and temporary self-actualization she offers her little monsters – Mother Monster must sell and re-sell herself as such, taking pieces of silver from her public. Still effectively a drug dealer, Lady Gaga does nonetheless offer access to the plane of faith, thus creating the possibility for her little monsters to find their own way to transcendence, if only they are strong enough to resist the lure of the imitative (Deleuze and Guattari 284) and “illusory” (Jenson 19) transcendence Gaga must use as bait.

The final moments of “Judas,” find Lady Gaga in a wedding dress, stoned to death for her betrayal of Jesus. Of this scene, Gaga says, “if I’m going to get stoned for making this video, I’ll stone myself first” (Sun) a remark eerily similar to her 2010 assertion that, “if I can show my demise artistically to the public...I can show you so you’re not looking for it” (“Lady Gaga: The singing sensation”). Considering these



sound-bytes alongside our three analyses, each of which has unearthed a betrayal of sorts on the part of Lady Gaga, we come to this final thought: Hyper-aware of the pitfalls of fame and positioning one's self as a vehicle towards transcendence and self-actualization, Gaga delivers portrayals of her downfall so that we may not seek to destroy her ourselves, as we have done to so many icons before her. More to the point of this analysis, with "Judas," Lady Gaga is laying herself bare, washing herself clean by admitting her duplicity and necessary attachment to commerce and the plane of organization.

Far from being a selfish act and yet not entirely selfless, Gaga's mediation of the powerful forces of materialism and spirituality personified in "Judas" is a task worthy of Atlas. To be as explicit and concise as possible, Lady Gaga is engaged in a relationship with her fans that mimics Deleuze and Guattari's conception of becoming though it is not, and *cannot* be a becoming in the purest sense given the all-encompassing power of the plane of organization and the capitalist culture it supports. That being said, by crafting her art from and on both planes while simultaneously refusing to allow the plane of organization to collapse upon and domesticate the becomings of the plane of faith, in remaining upright under the weight Lady Gaga does more to encourage her fans to find their own power hidden in the power they have given to her (Durkheim 239) than any celebrity before her. Regardless of how fleeting the moments of self-actualization achieved are or the 'addiction' to Lady Gaga as commodity they require, she nonetheless "speak[s] in future tense," imagining a possible future where fandom can inspire "the most highly valued...expression of...community" (Sylvan 4) with fans coming together, each exposed to the other (Nancy 143), not alone, but divine (Nancy 144).

## Conclusion

### I

Deleuze and Guattari assert that “the only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between” (277), and that is exactly what Lady Gaga does with “Judas,” “Born This Way,” “Paparazzi,” and in her larger project of becoming-Gaga with her little monsters. Neither truly spiritual nor purely commercial but an alchemical mix of the two, Lady Gaga and the relation she encourages with her fans is one that navigates perilous ground and goes far beyond that of most other pop stars. In the preceding chapters, we have analyzed three examples of Lady Gaga’s art and found that in each, regardless of the surface opposition, she is engaged in a process that “profoundly blurs the distinctions” (McCaffray “Betrayal”) between good and evil, self-actualization and oppression, fan and icon. Treading the in-betweens, Gaga creates a space in which her little monsters are able to, if only for a moment, “become a new being” (Durkheim 249) on the transcendent plane of faith.

Considering the ephemeral nature of the transcendence achieved by the little monsters alongside Lady Gaga’s assertion that she “speak[s] in future tense,” we might fairly ask whether she is not simply a celebrity iteration of a religious prophet, claiming access to and knowledge of the spiritual but not delivering such to those who follow her. In the “Judas,” music video, Gaga explicitly indicates she is such a figure, emphatically gesturing to her own heart when delivering the lyric “even prophets forgave his crooked way”. Asserting Lady Gaga as a prophet, promising but denying her followers transcendence, would be a very simple and yet ultimately unsatisfying conclusion to this analysis. Although John Fiske claims fandom shares much with the hierarchy and

institutionalization of official culture (33), it seems to this fan that merely lumping fan practices with the religious and state organizations Deleuze and Guattari cite as having a “difference in nature” (242) to becomings does a disservice to Lady Gaga’s project and indeed fandom in general. Instead, in the concluding pages of this paper, we shall propose and explore the possibility that Gaga’s project is a productive one, the aim of which is to spur her little monsters to be their own gateway to the transcendent within them.

Theorists including Henry Jenkins have discussed the way that “the social dimension – the allegiance to fandom – often takes precedence over allegiance to particular media texts” (Jenkins, “Strangers No More” 213), which begins to point us to a potential way to view Lady Gaga’s project as more than simply an empty promise to her fans. What if, in the same way the little monsters made Gaga’s “spiritual hologram,” (Lady Gaga “Manifesto of Little Monsters”) of fame a reality, they could construct their fan practices in such a way so as to make the false promise of transcendence real? A brief consideration of how fan communities in general function will help to illuminate what would be required in order for this to occur.

As mentioned in the early pages of this analysis, most research on the spiritual elements of fandom focus on science fiction and fantasy fan communities, cultural products where the texts are fairly distinct from the performers who enact them. In these cases, as detailed by Camille Bacon-Smith in her 1991 book Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth, as well as Michael Jindra in his essay “Star Trek Fandom as a Religious Phenomenon,” the focus tends to be on the texts themselves and not the celebrities who help bring these texts to televisual or cinematic

life. This results in a lack of identification with an individual as responsible for the community that develops from this fandom and simultaneously offers fans the chance to draw their own path through the text in question to the transcendence that is belonging to a fan community. To connect this to the previous chapter's discussion of Durkheim's study of the totem, fan communities that develop from a cultural text and not an individual icon function like a clan whose totem is the kangaroo species and not an individual kangaroo. But what of fan groups that form out of a shared love for a particular cinematic or musical star?

In the case of a television or film personality, one can argue that there is no particular text whatever to offer one's allegiance to, save for interviews and sound bytes. Barry King's assertion that contemporary celebrities present themselves as "anything the occasion demands" (45) suggests film and television stars' identities as somehow lacking the perceived stability of religious deities. Although their work may take on aspects of their own public persona (King 47), these figures are essentially free to define and re-define themselves before their public, unlike Jesus for example, whose biography and self have been relatively stable for over a millennia. The result of celebrities' identity malleability is that the formation and continuation of a connection of the spiritual sort similar to that seen between Star Trek fans, for example, and the primary texts of that series is difficult. Without an attachment to a stable text, celebrities may fulfil the role of anomalous for fans, however exactly what sort of becoming their fascinating persona offers remains undefined, for the pack of which any given celebrity is anomalous is liable to shift at any moment.

Fans of musicians represent a mediation between fans of a particular media text

analysis of "Born This Way," although the song is by all accounts an anthem of self-expression, the particulars of that expression, as we illustrated, are mediated and indeed dictated by Lady Gaga herself. How then can we possibly consider the relationship between Gaga and her fans as one of a truly spiritual nature, encouraging community and the eradication of the notion that "men and women are men and women and the gods are the gods" (Nancy 142)?

Perhaps the key to understanding Lady Gaga's complex mediation of the commercial and the spiritual as well as the religious dimension of fandom in general is to consider more closely Gaga's insistent disavowals of her apparent desire for the material spoils of her fame. Just as she refutes members of the press who suggest she calls herself Mother Monster (MSNEntertainment), Lady Gaga also does all she can to deny herself as the one and only gateway to self-actualization and the transcendent plane of faith. Although our second chapter elucidated the way by which "Born This Way" implicitly demands fans to be re-born in Gaga's image, Lady Gaga is emphatic that her goal is to encourage her little monsters to love themselves. Speaking to her congregation at The Monster Ball, Gaga stresses "don't leave here loving me more, leave here loving yourself more" ("Lady Gaga Presents the Monster Ball Tour"), which is tantamount to her denying herself the worship she has so tirelessly worked to attain. To put this more explicitly in relation to the theorists upon whose work our analysis rests, this suggests something of Gaga slipping "into and [being] lost in the anonymity of the...pack" (Deleuze and Guattari 243), encouraging each member to be revealed to the others in their own particularity (Nancy 149).

In simultaneously coveting and refuting the importance of fame, Lady Gaga is

perhaps, to paraphrase Jean-Luc Nancy, offering herself as an unattainable purchase. By courting fans to raise her to the heights of celebrity, Gaga is making her little monsters her “servitors” (Durkheim 237), channelling the “source of energy” (Durkheim 224) within each of them for her own purposes; the difference between Gaga and many other celebrity icons is that at least in part of her aim is to direct that externalized energy back towards her fans in a way that encourages their own elevation. In other words, Lady Gaga’s project is one akin to the practices of the totemic clan, but taken a step further. In the case of totemic religions, the power given to the totem must never be revealed as coming from within the clan members themselves (Durkheim 239), for then societal institutions would crumble and organized religion “would never be born” (Durkheim 239). The explicit aim of Lady Gaga’s project is to reveal to each of her fans’ their inherent power – the fact that “we are all born superstars” – and yet this revelation, far from bringing about the eradication of subject positions and thus destroying Gaga as Icon and the plane of organization, merely cements her as a pop music goddess. Perhaps, then, the responsibility for the ultimate failure of Gaga’s project should be placed on the shoulders of the little monsters themselves, Deleuze and Guattari’s “imaginary dummies” (245) who refuse to fashion themselves as their own gateway to self-actualization and thus negate their own power to come into community and the divinity associated with not being alone (Nancy 144).

## II

Before condemning those who created Lady Gaga and so many before her as icons through their devotion, let us once more consider the most basic desire behind the practice of fandom. Henry Jenkins, Andy Bennett and countless other thinkers have

affirmed and re-affirmed that fans exist and come together as a result of the human aspirations for community and identity. These are the self-same desires behind social institutions such as the family, the state, and yes – the church. The difference between the two types of groups is twofold. First, the latter collection of institutions requires long-term, committed and stable allegiance, whereas fan identities are expected to shift throughout the course of one's lifetime (Bennett "Subcultures" 106-109). Though this paper does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the consequences of the fandom's ephemerality, it is important to note that it allows for a fans' identity to be "fluid rather than fixed" (Harrington qtd. in Jenkins "Aca-fandom and Beyond"), malleable in a way much less acceptable in the more established institutions of the plane of organization. Fan practices allow for definition and re-definition of the self – to be 'born this way,' over and over again – through any number of popular culture affiliations. While we've explicated that the becomings promised by Lady Gaga and cultural icons more generally are not authentic in the way explicitly intended by Deleuze and Guattari, they are akin to them, and as such, we can consider shifting fan identities as similar to the multiplicities of becoming that "continually transform themselves into each other, cross over into each other...into a string of other multiplicities," with the self as a "threshold...a becoming between two multiplicities" (Deleuze and Guattari 249). To connect this back to the central difference between the institutions of the plane of organization and the practice of fandom, the latter allows for and even promotes the idea of the individual engaged in the process of becoming in a way ultimately shunned by groups such as the church, for whom there is but one becoming – the promised communion with god after death.

The second difference between fandom and the institutions of the plane of

organization relates to transcendence. The family, the state and the church explicitly offer transcendence through community but ultimately cannot deliver the community they promise, while fandom – at least fandom on the part of Lady Gaga’s tribe of little monsters – does at least offer a viable possibility for self-actualization and community. The difference is that under religion or the state, that transcendence is promised only if the devoted follow the right track, while Lady Gaga promises true transcendence if and only if her fans accept themselves in their monstrosity regardless of whether that iteration of selfhood aligns with the right track she offers them as a drug to ephemeral – transcendence.

Theoretical discussions aside, Lady Gaga’s continued success and her army of followers suggest that most of the little monsters prefer to take the easy, well-worn right track she offers in “Born This Way,” and that preference must be interrogated. In our analysis of “Judas,” we suggested that should Lady Gaga and her fans be truly revealed to one another, the estrangement between the two would vanish and Gaga would no longer be required to fill the role of fascinating anomalous. By the same token, were the little monsters to, through Gaga’s text and not simply her persona, gain true self-actualization and thus transcendence, they would no longer desire her as an anomalous or an Icon; rather, Gaga would simply be a member of the pack, no longer an exceptional individual. Authentic transcendence results in the eradication of the subject positions of fan and icon, man and god, producer and consumer (Deleuze and Guattari 280; Nancy 143), and thus ultimately puts an end to that which fans initially found themselves fascinated by. Read in this way, it is easy to understand why most little monsters content themselves with the false self-actualization associated with using their Mother Monster as the drug that helps



them achieve ephemeral transcendence.

In the process of becoming, the figure of the anomalous is aspirational in nature, a fascinating entity that encourages an individual to enter into a becoming. For fans, the figure of the icon plays a similar role, providing a model of sorts towards which one can aspire. Both Deleuze and Guattari and our analysis of the relationship encouraged between Lady Gaga and her fans illuminate that becomings can never be complete, and, for fans, this is how it must be if their fandom is to continue; the icon must remain extraordinary (Ellis 91) and estranged from her pack if she is to exist as such at all. Little monsters' refusal to craft their own gateway to the plane of faith thus amounts to a refusal to do away with the corporeal image of that which they aspire to. Considering the identity-building function of fandom, fans' preference of achieving only ephemeral transcendence rather than destroying their Mother Monster is a denial of the malleability of their selfhood that leaves them clinging and addicted to the demon with whom they initially made a pact that began the process of becoming.

Ultimately, the fandom associated with an individual icon is found to be more akin to the religions of the plane of organization than to the transcendence of the plane of faith for the simple reason that it is difficult for human beings to accept the idea that their core self is malleable. Rather than relinquishing their identity as little monsters in order to experience the true transcendence associated with accepting one's self as a haecceity, fans chain themselves to a single estranged icon and wait for a transcendence that will never come. In the case of Lady Gaga, she does all in her power to encourage her little monsters to find through her at least ephemeral transcendence, however as anomalous, she is unable to guide the way to more authentic transcendence for her guidance amounts

to the promised becoming “swirl[ing] into black holes” (Deleuze and Guattari 285).

If fandom is to be truly transcendent, fans must cease to allow their own power to work not for themselves but for the icons they worship. This requires that they first accept the malleability of selfhood and fandom itself. Only by repeatedly destroying their icon (as Lady Gaga has done to herself on so many occasions) and accepting their identity as a revolving door (Deleuze and Guattari 249) through which to access the possibilities of multiplicities within them, will fans gain authentic access to the plane of faith.

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